

THIS NETTLE, DANGER

A Novel by

PHILIP GIBBS

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"Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."
—HOTSPUR in *Henry IV.*

(As quoted by Mr. Neville Chamberlain on his way to Munich.)

I

FIFTH AVENUE was looking good in the eyes of one of its six million inhabitants when he stepped out of the Hotel Plaza and nodded to a porter who said: "Want a cab, Mr. Barton?"

"I'm for the subway, brother," said Mr. Barton, who was John Jennings Barton, Jr., not unknown to fame as far as his name had reached the readers of the *New York Observer*. Some of them were beginning to look for it. They liked his style, serious and informative without being dull. He seemed to know quite a good deal about human nature in the rough as well as in the smooth. Some of his descriptive articles in the magazine section were "swell", they thought. He saw familiar things with a fresh eye and an unusual slant. He had written a great story on the Hauptmann trial and had kept it up day by day without once letting down its grim and frightful drama. Then he had written that story about the Pennsylvania riots. Great stuff. Human and illuminating, though perhaps too sympathetic to the strikers. "He's worth watching," said men whose opinion carried weight in the newspaper world—reporters and columnists on other journals as far away as Chicago and Kansas City.

Fifth Avenue was looking good that morning in the eyes of John Jennings Barton, Jr., because he felt good with himself, having succeeded in interviewing an ex-ambassador just back from Europe who had given him the low-down about affairs over there.

"It was hell's cauldron," he said. If there was a general

European conflict the last war, in his considered judgement, would be a bagatelle compared with what would happen then. His opinion of Adolf Hitler and his lieutenants was not in their favour.

"I'm a hot gosseller for American isolation," he had told Barton gravely. "We must tighten up our neutrality laws and prevent Mr. Roosevelt getting sentimental over the defence of European democracies. What we want to do, and don't seem to be doing very well, is to defend our own constitutional liberties."

This ex-ambassador had been to Berlin, his old diplomatic pitch, and had come back with sensational facts regarding the furious tempo of German rearmament and the aggressive intentions of the Nazi leaders. Barton's interview with him would surely get big headlines on the foreign news page of the *Observer*.

Between the fortress-like blocks which flung purple shadows across the street there was a glint of gold in Fifth Avenue as the high sun caught the lettering on shop windows and gleamed on their plate-glass. A stiff breeze was blowing and teasing the frocks of battalions of young girls who were passing the Plaza. They looked as though life belonged to them. They were the butterflies of New York brought out by the sun after the torrential rains of late summer and they fluttered down Fifth Avenue as though it were a woodland glade.

Young Mr. Barton glanced at them with critical eyes as he waited for a second while a mass of metal, vibrating with terrific potential energy, was held in leash by coloured lights.

"Too much of a pattern," he thought. "Mass-produced beauty according to *Vogue* and the fashion merchants. I don't suppose they're worrying about the European situation, and why in hell should they?"

One of them seemed to like the look of him. He caught a rather pleasing smile, roguish beneath a funny little hat like

an inverted flower-pot with a feather sticking out of it, and being a young man of good manners he raised his hat in case he had happened to meet this siren somewhere. She might have been a friend of his sister Judy. On the other hand she might not.

Then he plunged into the subway for a journey down town to the *Observer* office. He was pushed on one side by a man in a hurry, and received a dig in the ribs from the sharper elbow of a young woman in a hurry, and found himself propelled into a smoking carriage by lots of people in a hurry. He knew all about that. He knew all about the types of humanity which crowded into this subterranean world. He had studied their faces and made up stories about their lives, and had even invented the reasons why each one of them was in such a hurry to go somewhere else. It all boiled down to a case of self-preservation. Everybody was afraid of losing his or her job. Everybody was in a hurry lest he, or she, should find the job taken by somebody else. That was the tempo of life in New York. It was perhaps the urge of life everywhere in an insecure world which had lost its old foundations and its old securities. Slumps. Unemployment. Cuts in wages. Cut-throat competition. All that had made life a feverish and desperate adventure even in the United States, though over in Europe that state of things was apt to be accompanied by murder, revolutions and international blood feuds.

John Jennings Barton succeeded in lighting a cigarette and hoped the fat man next him would remove a heavy foot from his right shoe. He thought back for a moment to that girl who had flashed a roguish smile at him. It was quite unlikely that she was a friend of Judy. Perhaps she liked his new suit, off the peg and not bad-looking. Well, he had not had much time for girls since he stepped into New York three years ago, after two years on the *Philadelphia Post*. He had been somewhat starved of feminine society while he was making a career in the newspaper world. There was one girl—Diana Feversham—who lingered in his mind sometimes even

when his thoughts were busy on some reporting job, but as she happened to live near Boston there was not much in that beyond a touch of sentiment. Newspaper life, especially in New York, was a full-time job. It demanded a man's body and soul in all his waking hours and often in hours when he ought to be sleeping. That gum-chewing slave-driver Charlie Seligmann thought he was going soft if he asked for a week-end now and then to see his people in Massachusetts or took more than a month in the summer when New York was almost intolerable in a heat wave.

"Call yourself a newspaper man?" Charlie Seligmann had asked him once, shifting a chewed cigar to the corner of his full lips. "It's like all you Harvard laddies—you think a newspaper office should be run on the lines of a petting party."

Harvard was becoming an ancient memory in the mind of John J. Barton, Jr.—seven years back. Sometimes he remembered his dreams there. He had dreamed of being a novelist like Sinclair Lewis or Hemingway and writing best-sellers in the world's beauty spots. It had never entered his head that he would be a New York reporter feeding a word-machine with its insatiable appetite for news, and being the slave of the telephone, which had no mercy on him day or night. Perhaps the game wasn't worth it really, he thought sometimes in moments of depression and self-distrust. But once it got hold of a man it was a hell of a job.

John J. Barton strode through the swing doors of the *Observer* office and took the elevator up to the reporters' room where several of his colleagues sat with their coats off before their typewriters. He could hear the click of their machines as they drove their stories along. There was the reek of cigar smoke. Billy Carrigan, the crime expert, was eating an orange. Miss Birdie Meyer who did weddings and social stuff was using her lipstick and looking worried about her nose in a hand-mirror. She glanced up as John passed her desk.

"You look very snooty to-day," she remarked brightly.

"I feel it!" he told her, cutting short her attempt to waste his time.

Miss Meyer had tried to vamp him from time to time most unsuccessfully. Now she had become resigned to his cold and chaste aloofness. He detested her.

"That was a nice piece you wrote yesterday," she said graciously.

"Think so?"

He went to his desk and settled down to work. This was his world. He liked it when he didn't hate it. He was doing well in it. He had made a place for himself on the *Observer*. He wouldn't quit it for anything on earth, though he didn't see enough of his people who lived near Boston—his father who was so mighty proud of him and his mother who thought that he was working himself to death, and his sister Judy who kept him in touch with home affairs by very amusing letters.

He wrote out his interview with the ex-ambassador and took it over to the desk where Charlie Seligmann was handling the copy for next day's paper. His perfectly bald head was glistening with little beads of sweat and his heavy jowl looked in need of a shave.

"What's this?" he asked. "One of your prose poems?"

"Ex-ambassador Goodrich," said John. "It's a good story. The searchlight on Europe. Hitler prepares for war."

"You're kidding yourself," said Charlie Seligmann. "We're getting too much of this foreign dope. To hell with Europe anyhow."

"That's the idea," said John calmly. "That's the line taken by the ex-ambassador."

"It makes me tired," said Charlie Seligmann, looking very fatigued indeed.

He seemed to remember something as John J. Barton moved away from his desk.

"There's a message for you, Barton. The Old Man wants to see you. Don't say I didn't tell you."

For a moment Barton's heart gave a slightly quicker beat. He stood in awe of the Old Man who was Mr. Julius K. Lansing, Editor of the *New York Observer*, and one of the greatest newspaper men of his time. He was a severe old gentleman who had no mercy on incompetence or dishonest work. Only last week he had fired a man for a fake story. Hurriedly Barton thought back to his own recent articles. Had there been anything wrong with them? He was getting a reputation for doing high-brow stuff and specializing on European affairs. Rather dangerous. It was getting away from his human interest stories, perhaps, on which he had built himself up. Was Mr. Lansing going to fire him by any chance?

In a time of business depression any excuse was good enough for cutting down the staff.

"What's he got in his mind, do you think?" he asked anxiously.

Charlie Seligmann closed one eye slightly.

"You'll find out, sonny. I fear the worst."

John J. Barton, Jr., feared the worst for a few minutes while he washed his hands in the lavatory, brushed his very fair hair, and cleaned his finger-nails. Since the depression which had begun with a "crisis" and become a habit, many good newspaper men had been flung out of their offices ruthlessly. Now and then he passed a few dollars to some of them who were in a bad way, and he knew his own luck in keeping his own job through the past three years although one of the juniors on the *Observer*. Older men than he had been given their pay slips for the last time, partly through their own fault perhaps, as hard drinkers or careless scribes. The Old Man, as they called him, had sent for them and they had come out of his room with a beaten look before they walked out for the last time taking their office coats off the pegs. Was it his turn now?

"I'm getting morbid," thought John as he glanced at

himself in one of the mirrors. "Maybe I'll get a raise. I deserve it!"

He squared his shoulders and smiled at his own reflection before going down the long passage, tapping at the door of his Chief's room, and opening it boldly. Mr. Julius K. Lansing was sitting back in his swing chair reading a letter with deep attention. His silvered hair and massive clean-shaven face gave him the look of a senator who might be nominated for the Presidency on personal appearance alone.

"You sent for me, Mr. Lansing?" asked John in his best Harvard manner.

Mr. Lansing looked away from his letter for a moment and pushed forward his horn-rimmed glasses.

"Come right in, Barton. Take a cigarette. Sit down."

He did not speak in the voice of a man about to deliver sentence of death.

Barton breathed more freely and sat on the arm of a heavy chair with one leg crossed over the other just to let the Old Man see he was perfectly at ease. He took a Chesterfield from a silver box and lit it from a patent lighter given to him as a birthday present by his sister Judy.

Mr. Lansing finished reading the letter which seemed important until he flicked it into the basket on one side of his desk.

"You've been doing some fine work lately, Barton," he said, "I've been watching it."

"That's mighty good of you, Mr. Lansing."

Barton felt the slight flush which came to his face at the compliment. It was pretty good to hear those words from a man who did not hand out many bouquets to his staff.

"You have the making of a good newspaper man," said Mr. Lansing. "You're a hard worker, and you seem to use your brains. Some fellows work hard but have no brains. Some fellows have brains but don't use them."

"He's going to raise my salary," thought Barton hopefully. "I shall buy a present for Judy. I wonder how she would like

that picture which caught my eye the other day—the book-shops on the Seine by a French artist. It looked good to me.”

Mr. Lansing cleared his throat and took a cigar from a drawer below his knees.

“I’m making some changes on the foreign staff,” he said. “Some of them are getting a bit stale. Some of them, like Spike Evans, have been soaking too much, I guess. It’s the strain of the European situation, I dare say. I’m not blaming anybody. But now that things look as if they were going to blow up over there I want younger men with good heads and good nerves. I’m sending you to England, Barton. You’d better sail in a week’s time. I’ve cabled Evans.”

“England!” exclaimed John Barton as though Mr. Lansing had said Mars or Jupiter. “England!”

Mr. Lansing’s thin lips creased to a faint smile.

“Never heard of it?” he asked dryly. “It’s still there—though from what our correspondents write you might think it won’t be there much longer. They seem to expect that it’s going to be laid low in dust and ashes some time next week, or perhaps the week after. They keep on altering their dates for Armageddon.”

“Perhaps I’ll be in time for it, sir,” said Barton in his Harvard manner. He spoke lightly but felt stupefied. He didn’t know England or the English. He didn’t want to quit his job in New York or lose contact with his family. England was quite a long way off and would be strange ground to him. He didn’t know much about English ways and customs, except what he had read about them. It might be difficult to get the right clues. England . . . Europe . . . It was a crazy world as seen from New York.

“It will give you a chance,” said Mr. Lansing. “If this war comes along—and I’m not for it—you will be one of our war correspondents. I’ll see you’re insured and all that.”

“It sounds fine,” said Barton humorously. “That will be a great comfort to the folks at home.”

He didn't really like the idea of dying under the ruins of Westminster Abbey. Still, he was prepared to take the chance.

"The English are a strange people," said Mr. Lansing thoughtfully, as he leaned back in his swing chair. "They take a lot of knowing. In some ways they're as secretive as the Chinese. But in my experience 'the damn fool' Englishman, as we put him on the stage, is not such a damn' fool as we're apt to think. It's largely a question of accent and manner. They have some traditional genius which seems to help them in time of need and they seem to have recovered from post-War conditions better than we have. You'll get to know their social habits after a while. Their caste system is rather disconcerting at first and it's not easy for a foreigner to get inside their walled gardens or behind their invisible masks. Every Englishman wears a mask. Don't forget that. When he takes it off in private now and then he reveals more intelligence than one might expect. Well, there's no need to give you a lecture about England. You'll be telling us what you've found out about the shape of things."

"I must say——" said John, desiring to express his gratitude and appreciation.

Mr. Lansing waved his hand slightly.

"That's all right, and there's one thing I want to say. All this talk of ours about American neutrality is just moonshine. If England is likely to get smashed our isolationism goes overboard. The British Empire is as much our concern as it is England's. Where would be our security if that system of order in the world were to be broken up by pirates and gunmen? We've been running isolation because it's the recent American mood. But it's not a policy that will hold water in a time of world catastrophe."

"Well, sir," said John Barton, who wanted to discuss that point. He believed in a system of Collective Security against all mad-dog nations and crazy dictators. He believed in the United States of Europe as the ultimate ideal. He was a League of Nations man.

Mr. Lansing blew a wreath of smoke out of his pursed lips and did not give Barton his chance of eloquence. He wanted to do all the talking.

"Distances in Europe aren't great," he said. "You will have your headquarters in London—you'll find Franklin Speed very helpful—but I should like you to make a few trips now and then to get the pulse of things—Paris, Rome, Berlin, Prague and other centres of news value. I look forward to good stuff from you, Barton. I know you won't let us down. I should be disappointed if you did. Well—that's that. Maybe I'll see you before you start."

He held out his hand—the thin, hairy, bony hand of an old man—and smiled into Barton's eyes.

"I must say, Mr. Lansing——" said John Barton.

"That's all right," said Julius K. Lansing. "Tell Seligmann you have the week off before sailing."

"All this is certainly most good of you——" said Barton, feeling emotional but perturbed. He was being rushed into a new sphere of action. Of course it was a great chance, but he wanted time to think over it. It would mean cutting adrift from all his bearings and from his own known world. Besides, he had been thinking lately about a girl named Diana Feversham. He had had an idea that if he could get a raise he might have put a proposition to her on the subject of marrying. He was beginning to feel the need of feminine charm. Diana Feversham had made a rather considerable impression upon him when he had seen her last with Judy. Now this plan of sending him into exile would spoil that day-dream of his. He was being hustled off the map of American life.

"Fine!" said Mr. Lansing. "Fine! Tell Seligmann I want to see him."

He swung round to his desk in his swivel chair and put on his horned-rimmed spectacles to read another letter.

John Barton hesitated for a moment, laughed slightly in a nervous way, and then left the Old Man's room feeling a little

weak about the knees, and with a pulse above its normal beat. Probably his blood pressure had gone up.

England! . . . Europe! . . . All very exciting and rather disturbing to the imagination. In a short time, according to the prophets, he might be buried beneath the ruins of a world war or choked to death by poison gas.

II

AFTER the interview with Mr. Lansing, John Barton had made an unexpected return to his father's house forty miles away from Boston. It was in the old colonial style, though a modern imitation, and stood in sixty acres of ground which his father had bought in the golden days of prosperity before something happened to Wall Street in 1929, with most unpleasant consequences to almost everybody, including Mr. John Jennings Barton, senior, whose business of wallpapers, linoleum and artificial panelling had had a severe set-back. There were still outward and visible signs in the Barton homestead of trade depression and the passing of dividends. The flower garden had not been so well tended since there was only one gardener instead of three. John's father drove his own car, having dispensed with the services of a chauffeur in uniform. The Cadillac had changed into a Ford. The woodwork of the house and its out-buildings had not been painted for some years and looked shabby and decayed.

John Barton, Jr., noticed these signs of deterioration as he drove up in a hired car from the local station four miles away and looked about him with observant eyes after six months absence in New York. Then he gave a Red Indian whoop to signify his arrival to anyone who might be interested.

Mrs. Cassidy was interested. She had been with the Bartons in good times and bad. She had nursed John and Judy through measles and chicken-pox in their childhood. She had been invaluable as a needlewoman when there were fancy-dress parties. She was terribly good at making apple pies and

baking clams. She was not so good out of the kitchen, having an Irish carelessness regarding dustpans and brooms and pails and mops which she left in the sitting-rooms and other places along her morning trail of activity.

"Good morning, Mary," said John cheerily at the sight of her. "How's life, and where's the family?"

"Mother of God!" cried Mrs. Cassidy, who was a good Catholic. "What's brought you back, Mr. John? Nothing wrong, I'm hoping."

"Everything all right," said John reassuringly. "Where's Mother? Where's Judy? Or are you the only one left alive?"

Mrs. Cassidy's Irish face beamed at him.

"Your mother is in Boston," she told him. "She's taking a course of classes in psycho-whatever-it-is—to keep her mind from rusting, she tells me, though I dare say there's no sense in it. Your father is worrying himself into fiddlestrings as usual and made a poor breakfast this morning before going to work, though there's no great business in spite of Mr. Roosevelt and all his fine promises. Miss Judy is in the studio, messing around and as lonesome as a woodlouse, poor darling."

John Barton did a little play-acting.

"This is a fine kind of home-coming for the prodigal son," he complained. "Does he smell the fatted calf? I'll say he doesn't."

"I'll cook something nice for you, darling," said Mrs. Cassidy. "And I must say you're looking fine, although you've been in that city of sin for so long, and writing wonderful fine stuff which Jem reads out to me now and again. And to think I carried you in my arms as a baby before you could walk or talk! You certainly seem to thrive in New York, Mr. John, though I wouldn't stay there myself for more than a week, and then wondering why God allowed it with all its crimes and wickedness. Little did I know when I was a young girl in County Cork——"

John did not wait for these reminiscences of Ireland in the age of innocence.

"I must go and have a look at Judy," he said good-humouredly. "See you again later, Mary."

His sister Judith was in the wooden hut at the end of the garden which her father had built for her when she first took up painting. He opened the door and stood for a moment smiling at her and enjoying her surprise. She stood by her easel in a blue overall stained with oil and paint. There was a smudge of green on her forehead which she had touched with a careless brush, and she had thrust her fingers through her mop of dark hair so that it was all tousled. On her bare feet was a pair of Indian moccasins.

"John!" she cried with astonishment in which for a moment there was a hint of alarm. "Why didn't you send us a night-letter or something? Anything wrong?"

"Do I look like it?" he asked. "And, say, what do you know about England?"

"England?"

She laughed at this absurd question. Had he come all the way from New York to ask her that?

She dropped her brush into a galley-pot full of turpentine and sat on the edge of her table smiling at her elder brother, who had made a name for himself in the newspaper world and had drifted away from home after their close comradeship as boy and girl except when she stayed in New York with him now and then.

"England!" she repeated. "What do I know about that?" She tried to remember what she knew. "William the Conqueror, ten-sixty-six—or was it ten-sixty-seven? The Prince of Wales, now Edward Eight. Canterbury Cathedral. Old houses, and new ones faked to look like old. Walled gardens. The National Gallery. The British Museum. Girls who laugh and don't tell you the joke. English boys in flannel trousers and shabby jackets with very nice manners. The River Thames with punts and coloured

cushions getting wet in the rain. An enchanted island full of history and old-fashioned folk. That's what I remember of England five years ago when Father was piling up fairy gold. Anything more I can tell you, John? Why do you want to know?"

John looked at her with the expression of a man who has great news to tell.

"I'm going there," he said. "I'm sailing next Friday. Old Man Lansing has chucked me out of the New York office. I'm for London and the European mad-house. I'm not used to the idea yet. It doesn't seem real."

Judith was duly astounded. A thousand thoughts passed into her eyes before she spoke one of them.

"Why, that's wonderful, John! I'm terribly glad for your sake."

John was not so sure it was as good as all that. Of course it was an honour to be chosen for this post by Mr. Lansing. Some of the other men might feel sore about it, and he had to admit that he had been crazy for a time to go to Europe, where so much history was happening. That had been one of his dreams at Harvard when he had been a great reader of English history, which had been his special line of study.

It had been a hard knock to him when the family fortunes had suddenly collapsed because of the financial blizzard which had swept across the United States after hitting all European countries. One result of it had been the cancellation of a European tour which had been promised him by his father before he decided on his future career. Paris, Rome, Venice, Vienna, Budapest, Munich, Geneva. They had mapped it all out, as Judy would remember. They had read up these places so as not to go to them with blank minds and just the tourist outlook. That dream had been blacked out by the smash on Wall Street and subsequent history. He had felt very sore about it at the time. Now . . .

"What's wrong with it now?" asked Judith. "Special

correspondent and all expenses paid! What could be better, John?"

Some secret thought seemed to be biting John Barton, Jr. He stood against the lintel of the door with a furrow in his forehead and a faint smile about his lips.

"It seems silly to shirk it," he admitted, "but I'm feeling nervous about it. It's not a simple proposition. I've done pretty well in New York. I mayn't do so well in London, England. I have an idea it will be more difficult in a foreign country which has its own peculiar ways. Besides, it means leaving friends and family for the hell of a long time, perhaps."

"How long?" asked Judith. "I should hate to lose you, John." There was a look of distress in her eyes for a second or two.

John shrugged his shoulders and gave an uneasy laugh.

"My predecessor has held down his job for fifteen years! He speaks with the English accent. He took unto himself an English wife. He has become one of those exiled Americans who've lost touch with their own folk. It's not a prospect that appeals to me. In fifteen years I shall come back to Massachusetts like another Rip Van Winkle searching for the friends of my youth and not finding them. I shall be forty-five years old. What do you think of that?"

Judith laughed at this flight through time.

"Don't think so far ahead, John!" she protested. "And don't miss the boat when it's waiting for you."

"There is a tide in the affairs of men

"Which, taken at the flood, leads on to Fortune."

John seemed to recognize the lines and gave her a brotherly grin.

"How does it go on?"

"Omitted," said Judith unfalteringly, "all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries."

John raised his eyebrows with surprise and admiration at this feat of scholarship.

"I'll bet there's not one Englishman in a thousand who could get as far as that."

"You'll be able to go to Stratford-on-Avon," said Judith with sudden ecstasy. "Oh, why wasn't I born a man? Why do women have to stay behind and do the household chores while their men-folk have the great adventures?"

John laughed, but gave his sister a searching look. He remembered something which Diana Feversham had told him about Judy, something about a cage too small for her wings.

"Getting introspective?" he asked. "Too much domesticity?"

"Well," said Judith after a moment's thoughtfulness and a flutter of eyelashes, "I admit that helping Mrs. Cassidy to keep the house clean doesn't entirely satisfy the hunger of what I am pleased to call my soul. But that's just foolishness. Why fuss about one's soul?"

"What about Art?" asked her brother. "I thought that filled up the aching void?"

He turned to take a look at her latest artistic effort as shown on her easel. It represented one of the barns with some pigeons on the roof and the backside of Jem Cassidy, busy trundling a wheelbarrow.

"Great stuff!" he said with real admiration. "I've seen worse in the Metropolitan Art Gallery."

Judith took her palette-knife and with one swift stroke of its blade scraped off the figure of Jem Cassidy.

"That's how I feel about it!" she said lightly and humorously. "It's all wrong, Mr. Barton, sir. It's out of drawing and has no sense of values. How can I go on painting alone in this wooden shack without keeping in touch with fellow craftsmen? I might do something in New York, but I can't do good work in the blue like this. Not that I'm whining. Don't think that! Mother and Father come first now that Lucy has gone."

Lucy, the eldest sister, had gone rather far away with a French vicomte who had married her in New York when the

family fortunes were at their highest peak before the fatal years of depression. Now she was living in Paris with a husband who seemed to think that he had been betrayed by the United States.

"You'll be able to see Lucy," said Judith, dropping her palette-knife after its murderous work. "Paris is only a hop from London. She'll be crazy when she hears that she will see you again."

"I've thought of that," said John. "And I'll be mighty glad to see her, but I'm sorry that you've spoilt that masterpiece, lady! If Art doesn't afford you the right amount of self-expression, what about that other anodyne?"

"Which one?" asked Judith innocently. "Do you mean booze?"

John grinned at her and hesitated for a second.

"Don't think I'm interviewing you for the *Observer*," he said, "but am I justified in mentioning the tender name of love? What happened to Ted Connolly?"

Judith flushed and gave a shy little laugh.

"Oh, Ted! He's hopeless. He hasn't earned five dollars since 1930, so there's not much in it. Besides, we're just good friends."

"Poor old Ted. I thought he worshipped the ground under your feet. Well, then, how about Emerson Hitchcock? Hasn't he gone crazy about you?"

Judith laughed again. She had a good contralto laugh pleasant to the ear.

"You're on the wrong line, John! Love and I haven't stabled horses together. I'm a predestined spinster. Men take a look at me and pass on! And I was twenty-eight last birthday. See Mother's text-book on psychotherapy for the cause and cure of unrequited love leading to nervous debility, emotional complexes, and psychical derangements."

John put one arm round his sister and hugged her against his shoulder.

"You can't make me believe that stuff!" he told her.

"For commonsense and poise give me Judy Barton in any time of crisis or domestic trouble. As for being a predestined spinster, I'd like to know what has happened to American manhood. Blind, deaf and dumb if they don't see beauty when it comes their way. I mean the beauty of mind and heart, lady!"

He noticed with a moment's dismay that his sister's eyes were wet. It was the first time since their childhood together that he had ever seen this distressful phenomenon.

"What's the matter?" he asked with a shy tenderness.

"Perhaps I'm dug in here too much," she said. "Perhaps I'm too much alone with my own ego. How absurd at my time of life!" She laughed at her own absurdity.

"Now look!" said John. "I've something on my mind."

It was some seconds before he said what was on his mind.

"I've a great idea," he told her after that hesitation. "It's blinding in its brilliance. I see stars, as the poet said. It solves every difficulty."

"It seems to be a perfectly good idea," said Judith, who had recovered her normal poise and looked at her brother with a humorous expression which touched the corners of her lips.

"It's some idea," he admitted. "It's one of those simple thoughts which reshape the destiny of men."

"Spill it!" said Judith.

"You're coming with me to Europe," he announced, as though it was all settled. "We'll set up house together in London, England. You'll coach me in the English accent and keep me from dropping bricks in English drawing-rooms. In due time you will marry an English lord with few brains but many acres. You will have innumerable children upon whom their parents will dote in their old age. I shall play bears with them after office hours."

Judith laughed at his idea, which she found very comical indeed. But it was quite impossible. She had to look after Mother and Father, and to help Mrs. Cassidy with the cleaning.

"That's not good enough," said John firmly. "Too many lives have been ruined by mother-love and devoted daughters. It's time you broke away, Judy. I'm going to see that you do. England is going to know Miss Judith Barton and her big brother. Together we will walk up Bond Street and show ourselves to Buckingham Palace."

Judith was amused, but not encouraging.

"It's sweet of you, John. Of course I'd give my skin to come with you, but I'm a loyalist. I don't forsake the authors of my being when they need me, poor dears. I'm glad to be needed. See?"

John failed to see. He was scornful of this viewpoint.

"Pollyanna stuff!" he said. "I'll have to speak to Mother about it. I've a high respect for her moral sensibilities. I'll be surprised if she wants to spoil your young life and ardent spirit."

"John!" cried Judith distressfully. "For goodness' sake don't say a word about it. It will only make things more difficult."

He decided to say many words about it, having a certain obstinacy when once an idea had caught hold of him. This idea of taking Judith to England with him had stuck fast in his mind. Perhaps there was a slight selfishness in it of which he was unaware. Judy would be a moral support to him in his first encounters with the English.

III

JOHN's father and mother heard the news of his assignment in Europe with surprise and pride. On Mrs. Barton's part there was a sudden pang at the idea of losing her son for an uncertain time. Previous to the dreadful year of 1929, which had been the beginning of lean times, Europe would not have seemed to her so far away. In the golden years of prosperity she had made several trips over there with her husband, and once with Judy. She had brought back shawls from Venice, lace from Milan, frocks from Paris, and bits of porcelain from Dresden. On the mantelshelf of her own sitting-room there was a model in china of Ann Hathaway's cottage, and in the billiard-room her husband had decorated his walls with sporting prints bought in Bond Street in London. Now a trip to Europe would be difficult until business looked up again.

"It's great news, John!" she told her son, bravely. "Of course we shall miss you a lot if you stay over there too long, and you're a poor letter-writer. We shall have to keep in touch by mental telepathy. There's really no such thing as distance between two loving souls. We don't make enough use of spiritual vibrations. I was only listening yesterday to a lecture on that subject in Boston. It was by an Indian philosopher who communicates regularly with his friends at home merely by mental transmissions, with remarkable results."

"It must save him a lot in cable fees," said John, smiling down at this little white-haired lady who was his mother. "I wonder if I could work it with the *New York Observer*. I

wonder how Charlie Seligmann would take down a mental message from me!"

He was patient and tolerant of his mother's intellectual enthusiasms, though he and Judy mocked at her now and then. She had taken courses in psycho-analysis by a Bostonian disciple of Freud, and attended a series of lectures on Yogi by a Bostonian initiate in Hindu philosophy. She had also attended a number of séances by a Bostonian spiritualist who had a considerable clientèle, including well-known Boston business men, until he was discovered faking his results and parading about the room wrapped in a blanket as an ectoplastic materialization of a Red Indian Chief. In spite of these leanings towards occultism and other mysteries she was endowed with a practical commonsense and a shrewd humour, which seemed inconsistent with those interests. They kept her mind busy, she said, and prevented her from getting old before her time. They were just as harmless, she thought, as crossword puzzles, to which she was also devoted.

"I want to have a talk with you about Judy," said her son.

Mrs. Barton gave a faint little sigh.

"That's just it," said John. "I have an idea. . . ."

It was not possible to discuss the idea at that moment, owing to the arrival of John's father just back from the office, and a telephone call from the Fevershams, who proposed to come round after dinner if that were perfectly convenient to Mrs. Barton. It was perfectly convenient.

"I'm proud of you, son," said Mr. Barton as he sat with John in the porch while Judy was preparing the coffee for them and Mrs. Barton was talking on the telephone to other neighbours, telling them the news of her son's forthcoming departure to Europe.

"That's very good of you, Father," said John modestly.

He thought his father was looking older and worn. He worried too much about economic conditions in the United States and had grave doubts—to say the least of it—about the policy of Mr. Roosevelt. That was a subject which had to be

barred from family discussion. John was a Roosevelt man, not having lost his faith in the glamour of a personality which had given new hope to millions in a time of deep adversity, nor his hero-worship of a leader whose cheerful and courageous voice had been like a trumpet-call to a depressed nation. Of course he had made some mistakes—who wouldn't?—and he had been badly served by some of his subordinates—grafters and charlatans—but he still stood, in the opinion of John Jennings Barton, Jr., for human and democratic ideals in which glowed a generous pity for the underdogs, the unemployed, and all the humble wage-earning folk of the United States, not in too good a shape during recent years.

Mr. Barton stretched out a thin bony hand and touched his son's knee for a moment.

"I haven't said much about it, John, but your mother and I have followed your career with real pride. We read your pieces in the paper as though every word were written in gold. We cut them all out and keep them pasted in a book. And they're good. They're great stuff."

John smiled from a deck-chair in which he lay back with his long legs outstretched.

"Some aren't as good as all that, Father!" he protested. "Charlie Seligmann doesn't think much of them, and he knows!"

Mr. Barton plugged his tobacco into his pipe. He made a mental note that Charlie Seligmann was a low fellow.

"Friends at the Club often speak of your work in a very gratifying way," he said gravely. "Only to-day Jem Dickson was speaking that way at lunch. 'That boys of yours,' he said, 'has some good grey matter in his head. I learn a lot from him,' he said. 'Whenever I see his name in the *New York Observer* I know I'm going to read something worth while.' That's what Jem Dickson said only to-day, and I liked to hear it."

"I like to hear you liked to hear it, Father," said John, secretly amused by this enthusiasm from Jem Dickson, who

was not exactly one of the intelligentzia, though a good salesman of artificial manures and a very honest soul.

"Now this mission to England," continued Mr. Barton, "is a very great honour, I take it, for a young man of your age. It's a proof that Mr. Lansing recognizes your quality and is willing to trust you in a position of high responsibility at the present time."

John gave a nervous laugh, slightly uneasy, though he was not deficient as a rule in self-confidence.

"It's not going to be easy," he said. "I shall feel I have to tread warily at first. England takes some knowing, I should say."

"Sure," said Mr. Barton after some thought on this point. "The English are not easy to understand. I've never been there long enough to size them up. I've only had a tourist view of that country, and made only a few contacts here and there. But we come of their stock, as well you know, son. The Bartons came from Devonshire in the old days, and I once saw their tombstones in Totnes churchyard. We share their heritage in law and literature and the fundamental ideas of liberty, as I like to remember."

John was not listening with much attention to his father's monologue. He was wondering what kind of contacts he would make in England. He had heard that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a newspaper man to obtain information from the British Foreign Office or other Government Departments. And the English people he had met in New York had not filled him with any deep admiration. They were inclined to be supercilious and affected. They tried very hard, and failed, to hide a certain condescension towards American life and manners. English lecturers, much favoured by his mother, bored him dreadfully, and as for manners, were not very punctilious. Mrs. Benjamin Cabot Brown, who entertained them at her house, complained that one English author had gone to bed and refused to come to dinner, to which she had invited the best people in Boston to

meet him. He said he felt confused in his head by so much conversation on his lecture tour and desired a restful evening. Not exactly Sir Charles Grandison behaviour, though the reason he gave was not unsound. Then there was that English lord who had come heiress-hunting in New York and left all his bills unpaid at the Ritz Carlton when he returned without a bride.

"It seems to me that Europe is in a very unsettled state," said Mr. Barton, unconscious of his son's straying thoughts. "I wouldn't like you to get caught in a world war. Our foreign correspondents are steeped in gloom these days. It's likely one has to discount some of their prophecies. Some newspaper men are apt to lay on their colours rather thick for the sake of sensation, though I mustn't say so in the presence of a newspaper man who knows more about it than I do!"

His thin lips creased to a smile as he looked over at his son, lolling back there in the deck-chair with his hands clasped behind his head.

"We'll know more about it," he said, "when you get over there, John. You'll give us the right dope, and I hope you'll relieve some of our anxieties."

"I'll take a look round," said John. "I'll report the results in due course, Father."

He saw his father get up from his chair to greet his guests, who came out to the porch with Judy and Mrs. Barton. John unclasped his hands and stood up for the same purpose. Diana Feversham, he thought, after one smiling glance at her, was looking very attractive as usual.

"This is friendly of you, Alice," said Mr. Barton, taking Mrs. Feversham's hand. "Our John will be glad to see you before sailing."

He turned to his friend Feversham, with whom he played golf, and gave his hand a hard grip.

"You're looking fine, Alfred! How do you keep so young?"

Alfred Feversham punched him lightly on the shoulder.

"None of your humbug, John! It was only this morning I was telling Alice that I should have to buy a bottle of hair dye—one of those bottles which tell a man he will hold his job down better if he gets rid of his grey hairs. But this is exciting news about John Jennings Barton, Jr. My boy Bryan will be glad to see him in London."

He placed his hand affectionately on young John's shoulder and said: "Fine! You have a great adventure ahead, young feller!"

"Why, yes!" cried Mrs. Barton. "It will be nice for our two boys when they get together again."

Mr. Alfred Bryan Feversham agreed with her heartily. His son Bryan was doing well in the American Embassy over there on the commercial side. But he found London expensive. So did his father!

His father could afford the expense, in spite of business depression. He had done well out of real estate, in Florida, as well as nearer at home in Massachusetts. Somehow he had kept most of his gains, though he complained that he was getting poorer every day that passed with Mr. Roosevelt at the White House. He had an estate of eight hundred acres whose low stone wall separated his land from the Bartons' smaller plot of earth. His wife Alice was an elegant and well-travelled woman who could talk easily of English lords, French vicomtes, Italian counts, and Russian ex-grand-dukes. She had presented Diana at the English Court a year back and had heard Queen Mary say: "What a pretty girl!" when that débutante had made her curtsy to Edward Eight. She had an inexhaustible reservoir of social conversation in a high tone, and also had political views and detested President Roosevelt with a violence which did not admit of contradiction or compromise.

"Hullo, John," said Diana, raising her arm in salute. "How do you feel about it?"

She was a tall young creature with her father's blue

eyes and Nordic look. She had well-shaped arms which were sleeveless in an evening frock showing the lines of a shapely figure which looked well in riding kit, or in a short tennis frock, or polo shirt, as John had seen her now and then. In appearance she went back to the period of Charles Dana Gibson's types of American youth and beauty. In mind she belonged to the post-slump era of America from which had departed the spirit of Pollyanna and faith in old slogans which had been a comfort to her predecessors.

"I'm feeling good about it," said John, "apart from mental reservations and the pangs of parting from those I love."

"How many do you include in that category?" asked Diana with a flutter of eyelids and the flash of a smile.

John said his heart had room for almost the whole of Massachusetts and considerable sections of New York.

"It's going to be a wrench," he told her, "when I see the skyscrapers of New York fading out in the mist behind me."

"It's not much of an exile," she assured him. "You will be busy in London getting out of the way of American acquaintances."

"Any chance of your coming over?" asked John with a certain eagerness.

In his own mind he regretted having seen so little lately of Diana Feversham. The *New York Observer* had separated them just as he was getting sentimental about her. He had been sentimental with her one night at a dance in Boston. They had drifted out into the garden under a sky of black velvet studded with stars. He had wanted to kiss her while she was talking very seriously on the subject of economic conditions in the United States, about which she seemed to know something, though he hadn't paid much attention, being rather startled and alarmed by this amorous desire which crept over him. They had discussed books—Hemingway's latest—and *Anthony Adverse*, which was good, they thought, if one didn't get tired. She had listened remarkably well to his description of life in New York as a newspaper reporter, and had laughed

at the right times, so that she seemed to be highly intelligent to a young man of critical mind. She had a very nice neck, he observed, that night in the garden. He wondered how young men of his own class and caste prepared their way for a little dalliance. He hadn't an idea really about that kind of thing, though he had discussed it once or twice with Judy, who seemed equally immune from adventures of that sort, unless she concealed them from an inquisitive brother. Looking back on it, he must have bored Diana that night because she made an excuse presently to join Judy and the others, and was more vivacious he noticed with a fellow named Caldwell, who danced like a gigolo. He felt that he had missed the boat somehow by over-caution.

"I may come over next summer," she told him. "Don't cut me dead in Bond Street if you happen to see me!"

"Not a chance of that," said John. "I shall take off my coat and lay it at your feet as Sir Walter Raleigh—or was it Sir Francis Drake?—laid his coat at the feet of Queen Elizabeth."

Diana was good enough to laugh.

"That will be a good coat ruined," she said. "There are sure to be puddles on the pavement in Bond Street."

"That's my idea," he agreed. "That's my gallantry."

Dew was falling and a thin mist was creeping up on a late summer evening in Massachusetts after a golden day. Coffee was served in the drawing-room, furnished in the old colonial style with some rather nice pieces bought in Boston and Philadelphia. On the walls were portraits of eighteenth-century men and women who might have been Mr. Barton's Devonshire ancestors, though they had been bought with the furniture after much haunting of sales by Mrs. Barton, when linoleum and wallpapers were going strong.

The conversation drifted inevitably towards England now that John was going there.

"They're an odd people—the English," said Mr. Feversham, lighting his after-dinner cigar. "In my judgement they're going soft."

"How?" asked Mr. Barton with a hint of challenge. He had a soft spot in his heart for England. He remembered some nice people he had met in an old inn in Winchester—an old inn with ancient timbers and an unusual name—the "God-begot". They had been interested in him as an American. The father was an English colonel and had shown him over the Cathedral. His boy's name was on the war memorial of an English regiment—killed in action—and the Colonel had spoken rather tragically about the war and its cost of young life. . . . And Mr. Barton remembered one of the chambermaids at Brown's Hotel—a nice young woman who had told him about her boy friend who had been killed in Palestine. He remembered other English people he had met—all very friendly.

"They keep on lying down," said Mr. Feversham. "When that question of sanctions came up against Italy it looked as though the old British Lion hadn't gone dead after all. It sat up at Geneva and roared very fiercely. But when it came to imposing oil sanctions and Mussolini threatened to fight about it the old lion put its tail between its legs and scuttled. Now they're lying down to Hitler. They let him break the Treaty of Locarno, and reoccupy the Rhineland with his troops and guns, with only a feeble whine of protest. France was ready to fight. Not so England. They've let their Fleet grow mouldy. They've let Germany become masters in the air, and as far as I can make out they're ready to toe the line to any dictator with a loud voice. They're letting down democracy. They've become pacifists and parlour Bolsheviks."

"Now, Alfred!" said Mrs. Feversham. "Don't prejudice John against the English before he gets his first reactions. You know I look back to my visits in England with real joy. They have a sense of tradition which we haven't. They have a beautiful loyalty to their King and the Royal Family."

"Alice," said Mr. Feversham, warningly, "if you tell that story about Queen Mary——"

"Don't you be brow-beaten, Alice!" cried Mrs. Barton. "We're all longing to hear that story about Queen Mary."

"What I can't understand about the English," said Mr. Feversham, "is their self-satisfied belief in their own superiority to all the rest of mankind. That worked all right when Britannia ruled the waves and when they had first start in the industrial era, but the world has caught up with them and gone beyond them, and they don't seem aware of the fact. They think they still have the lead in good form, honesty, justice and all the qualities of civilization. It just isn't true. Why, I know a hotel in London where they haven't any running water in the bedrooms and still use the old-fashioned jugs and basins. It made me laugh. Their cooking is deplorable. Their slums are a disgrace. Their women are badly dressed. As for honesty, what about their non-payment of debt? Is that honest? As Mr. Coolidge said, 'They hired the money, didn't they?'"

"There's more to it than that," said Mr. Barton in his slow, thoughtful way. "England had a heavy burden to bear in a war which had gone on for two years before we came in. They couldn't pay back the war debt because we wouldn't take their goods. As for civilization, I dare say the genius of the English people and all they've given to the world—Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens—is worth more than running water in the bedrooms. I may be wrong."

"You are wrong, old friend!" said Mr. Feversham good-naturedly. "Shakespeare was all right, though he bores me a lot if ever I go into a theatre where they're playing him. But a nation can't live on its past. It must go forward or perish. That's the law of life. The English are trying to keep alive on their old traditions. In my belief the British Empire is beginning to break up. The Dominions won't be dictated to any longer from Whitehall. They're young and dynamic. England is old and tired and losing grip. It's just a museum of historical interest—a peep-show for tourists, thrilled when they see the Lord Mayor's Show or some old pageant. Do you get me, Alfred?"

"I get you," said Mr. Barton dryly, "but I don't agree

with you. You can't kill the spirit of a people. It's true England is tired. It would be pretty surprising if she didn't feel tired for a while after a war which bled her of life and treasure. Her people want time for convalescence. That's how I look at it. What's your opinion, son?"

He turned to John as though a newspaper reporter in New York ought to be heard on the subject.

John decided to suspend judgement. Secretly he agreed a good deal with the opinions expressed by Mr. Feversham. Theoretically he disapproved of England for letting the Japs get away with Manchuria, and Mussolini with Abyssinia, and now Hitler with treaty-breaking. As a League of Nations man he accused England in his own mind of letting down the ideals of Geneva and the principles of collective security against aggressor nations. England was showing the white feather, he thought, and truckling to the dictators. So he had talked among his friends in Greenwich Village, who were all of that opinion, though they went further than he did in their leanings towards Communism and the Extreme Left.

"I'll wait until I get more first-hand knowledge," he said with unaccustomed diffidence in the value of his convictions.

"Good for you, John!" said Judy approvingly from her place behind the coffee-cups.

"I'm getting frightened of John," remarked Diana insincerely. "He's becoming so very wise and cautious!"

Was it a reminder to him that he had been too wise and cautious in a Boston garden under a velvet sky crowded with silver stars? For a moment that thought came into John's head, and then was dismissed as a silly idea.

"As a newspaper reporter," he said, meeting her mischievous smile, "one learns to be cautious of human evidence. What I've heard about England may be all wrong."

"Well, we'll soon know," said Diana with a slight hint of irony. "It will all be in the *New York Observer*. I must

admit that Bryan hasn't found out much except the cost of entertaining English girls after office hours. They seem to have healthy appetites."

"That boy costs me a lot of money," said Mr. Feversham with a good-natured laugh in which there was a touch of pride. "His expenses sheet is frightening."

The conversation took a twist. Mrs. Barton had heard of a medium who talked with Mr. Wilson. He was very troubled about world conditions and the weakness of the League. Mrs. Feversham had been told over the telephone by a friend in New York that King Edward VIII intended to marry Mrs. Simpson.

"Why not?" asked Judy from behind the coffee-cups.

The question was answered for some time by Mrs. Feversham, who had strong views on the subject and felt very deeply, she said, for Queen Mary.

After an hour of this the conversation wandered into other channels. Mr. Feversham had heard privately that an important man on Wall Street was to be indicted for fraudulent conversion of funds and criminal conspiracy.

Mr. Barton groaned.

"There's too much of that kind of thing in the United States," he said harshly; "we're losing our old sense of morality. All this corruption, graft, and fraud makes me despair of the American future."

"You despair too easily, old friend," said Mr. Feversham. "Every great nation has its criminal element. That's human nature. We have less than most others, though we say more about it in the Press. We publicize our own criminals until the outside world thinks we're inhabited exclusively by gunmen. Thank God I still believe in the virtues of the American folk in the mass. If only Mr. Roosevelt——"

"Alfred!" cried Mrs. Feversham. "If you start discussing that man I shall say things which I shall regret. Please . . ."

"Mr. Roosevelt . . ." said Mr. Feversham.

"John and I are all for him," said Judy with a sudden flush of colour.

"Lady——" said Mr. Feversham, turning towards her with one finger raised in warning but a humorous look in his blue eyes.

The conversation on Mr. Roosevelt lasted for some little time and became heated on both sides—John, Judy, and Diana being on the side of economic idealism.

"Well, this has been a pleasant evening," said Mr. Feversham as ten o'clock struck on a grandfather clock in the corner of the room. "We've discussed European affairs, the American Constitution, art, literature and life, but we've omitted one little ceremony which must now be performed."

He raised his glass of whisky and held it towards John.

"Happy days in Europe!" he said. "We shall miss you, my dear lad. We shall follow what you write in the *New York Observer*. We hope that the coming war, if it comes, won't impair your health or spirit, and for God's sake help to keep the United States out of that European dog-fight. We put our trust in you, John Jennings Barton, sir!"

"For all of which I thank you," said John, with a cheery laugh. "I hope I shan't let you down."

It was the end of the evening except for a private conversation with his mother.

She came into his room before he started undressing and surprised him by her words.

"I'm worrying about Judy," she said. "Don't you think it would be a good idea if she went with you to England for a few months? I think we can afford it now that we're selling that bit of land to the Fevershams."

"Why, Mother!" exclaimed John. "It's just the idea that was working in my own head. But what will you do without Judy?"

Now that his mother had made the suggestion he held back from pressing it. He could not think of how the home would go on without Judy always at hand—Judy helping to make

the beds, Judy busy in the kitchen when guests arrived, Judy making the coffee after dinner, Judy working in the flower-garden, Judy driving the car into Boston, Judy on the telephone and remembering everything. His father and mother would be lost without her.

"I don't believe in vampire mothers," said Mrs. Barton. "It's time Judy broke away from us for a time. She's been too closed in. I want you to persuade her. I've been talking to Father and he agrees, though, of course, we shall both have heartache while she is away."

"Well, you're a noble pair of parents," said John enthusiastically. "I must say I think it's terribly good of you both. But I confess I'll go to England with an easier mind if I have Judy with me to keep me company for a few months."

Judy took a lot of persuading. But she was persuaded, and the names of Mr. John Jennings Barton, Jr., and Miss Judith Barton appeared on the passenger list of the *Queen Mary* when she sailed for Southampton.

IV

JOHN stood with one hand on Judy's shoulder looking back at New York as gradually its tall buildings, like fortresses in some fantastic dream, were faintly pencilled against the sky until they were veiled and lost.

"I've left the world I know," said John. "Good-bye New York and all that! It was very decent of Charlie Seligmann and his wife to send those flowers."

Judy was silent. There was a mist of tears in her eyes. She had been coerced into this trip to Europe. Of course, she had been greatly tempted, but felt conscience-stricken at having yielded to this desertion of all her domestic duties and loyalties.

Suddenly she turned and put her hand on her brother's arm.

"Oh, John! I can't think what Father and Mother will do without me. I ought not to have come, although its terribly nice to be with you in this wonderful ship."

"Put your conscience to sleep," said John cheerfully. "It's time it took a rest. And don't let it spoil the next few months. You and I are going to have a great time together, and this trip is a good beginning. We're going to have lots of fun with our fellow-passengers, if I know anything about the human comedy."

He had already made a few contacts, and his reporter's eye had recorded a thousand observations of human and dramatic interest. At the counter of the purser's office he had stood by

while a little lady with plucked eyebrows and pink finger-nails had given hell to one of the purser's clerks for not providing her with a more spacious stateroom. She was Sophie Steinach, the famous film star, who had once thrown a party in New York to which John had had the honour of an invitation. It had been quite a party, which had left him with a headache for three days.

"Anything I can do for you, Miss Steinach?" he asked.

She turned her head with that languid grace and sleepy smile which delighted the camera men of Hollywood, who implored her to "Hold it, girlie!"

"Hullo, Johnny Barton!" she exclaimed. "Do you own this ship or anything of that kind?"

Next to her was a tall, lean-jawed young man in a grey, well-waisted suit and a low-crowned felt hat—a very smart lad indeed. At the name of Johnny Barton he turned with a quick glance and smiled in answer to John's nod.

"Looking forward to a good trip?" asked John.

"I'll say I am," was the answer from a very smart young man whom John had last met in Sing Sing, where he was temporarily billeted for an accident with a wallet in the Ritz Carlton.

John knew some of these fellow passengers on the *Queen Mary* by sight—a little Russian dancer with some other members of the ballet whose season had just finished in New York; Mr. Silas K. Lavinsky, who had the best house on Long Island, with Mrs. Lavinsky and her daughter by her previous husband; a Rumanian prince; Spike Longworth, the polo-player; and Marshal Duke, the dealer in antiques and old masters, genuine and otherwise, but, in the opinion of certain experts, mostly otherwise.

John had already cast his eye down the passenger-list. It was quite distinguished. There was an English earl on board and an ex-Cabinet Minister of England, who had done his best to ruin the world (as John thought) by his share in the Treaty of Versailles; and Peter Langdon, the English novelist, whose

books John had read with enthusiasm in his Harvard days. On the passenger-list there was a clutter of lords and ladies, major-generals and colonels, a vice-air marshal, a Japanese prince, a German baron, a French vicomte; and lots of names which looked more interesting because they might produce unexpected results of character and oddity—old-fashioned English names suggesting ancient manor-houses and Elizabethan mansions, and foreign names with a romantic flavour.

John had been interested in his first survey of these fellow-passengers storming the purser's office, finding their way about the ship, calling to their stewards. The English crowd were less excitable than some of the other foreigners. Some of them chatted to each other as though they belonged to a family party. English girls waggled friendly fingers at social acquaintances and called out: "Hullo, Betty! Hullo, Dick!" with little squeals of laughter in the English way.

"Very boring, all these preliminaries!" said a handsome Englishman whose clothes aroused the respect and admiration of John Barton. Beau Brummel would have dressed that way if he had come back to the modern world. He wore a monocle, which he let fall now and then to the length of a black cord.

John had eyed him with a smile. There was the perfect Englishman according to American imagination. His English accent, his English boredom with all this vulgar noise about him, were laughable. He announced to a pretty woman by his side that he proposed to get a breather on the boat deck and keep out of the way of the traffic jam until things had settled down a bit.

"These foreigners," he said, "get so damned excited, and I can't bear having my feet trodden on by mass-produced boots. I shall thank God when I step off at Southampton and get back to a peaceful life in quiet old Sussex."

"I've had a wonderful time," said the pretty woman by his side. "Quiet old Sussex doesn't appeal to me in the very least, my dear! It makes me die of boredom."

"You're so restless, Vera," said the handsome Englishman.

John had kept his ears and his eyes open, receiving many new impressions through those senses of hearing and vision. The majority of his fellow-passengers were English, he thought, as he listened to their conversation. Some of these English dames—probably the wives of generals and colonels—could not be called beauties. They dressed rather sloppily, he thought. They had big feet, which they exaggerated by wearing big shoes. But there was some character about them, some indefinable quality which didn't need to be dolled up. They were sure of themselves, in a quiet way with a touch of arrogance.

"How about unpacking?" he asked Judy presently. "It's nearing the dinner-hour as a secret voice whispers to me. If those evening shirts of mine have become mixed up with my boots and shaving-soap I shall disgrace you under the British flag on the first day out."

"You ought to have let me do your packing," said Judy; "it's not your strong suit."

They had adjoining staterooms on B deck, thanks to the personal influence of Mr. Lansing and the power of the *Observer*, so that they could talk to each other through a half-opened door.

"I wonder what table companions we shall have," said John, hanging up his well-worn Tuxedo, which later in history he learned to call a dinner-jacket. "If they're English I shall have to watch their technique. How does an English lord eat his roast beef?"

Judy laughed. He could hear through the half-opened door that her conscience was more easy. She wouldn't let it spoil the trip.

"Don't be absurd, John! We've been nicely brought up, haven't we? Didn't Harvard teach you how to hold your fork?"

"In the American way," said John. "The English way may be different, and they abhor anything in the way of 'bad

form'. That means anything different from what they do themselves. So I have been given to understand."

"They won't worry about what we do," said Judy, who knew her England as far as one visit. "I found them quite informal as soon as the ice was broken."

"Sure," said John, "but how does one break the English ice? One has to walk warily like Agag. Throw me a lifebelt if I fall through by making some terrible *gaffe*."

While they were dressing for dinner that evening there was the sound of a bugle outside their door, and going down B deck. It was playing a funny old tune, very pleasant and rather solemn.

"What does that mean?" asked John, brushing his hair strenuously. "I seem to know that trumpet-call. It's rather like 'God Save the King' slipping into 'The Old Stable Jacket'."

He could hear Judy laugh again.

"It's 'The Roast Beef of Old England'," she told him. "They always play it in British ships before dinner. It's one of their traditions."

"Well, that bugler boy knows his job," said John. "He must have a lot of breath to spare."

They had four companions at the dinner-table to which they had been allotted by the purser, or some high authority, of the *Queen Mary*. None of them took the slightest notice of John or Judy when they went to their chairs, rather late, owing to a slight misadventure with an evening dress tie which had gone into hiding until discovered in one of John's boots. Judy looked swell, he thought, in an evening frock of scarlet silk, which she had bought in Boston. It went well with her dark hair and eyes.

Their four companions were all English, as was instantly apparent by the rise and fall of their voices and the English accent, which seemed very affected, at first, to American ears. John Barton eyed them now and then warily, not without a sense of amusement. He listened to one of the girls speaking

in a high-toned, clear voice. "She's easy on the eye, as Charlie Seligmann would say," he thought. She was very fair, with a little plait round her head above a broad forehead and straight nose. There was something he didn't quite like about the set of her lips—a touch of hardness, or arrogance, he thought. Her arms were bare and richly coloured by sunbathing. So was her back, as he had noticed when passing her chair, which was exactly opposite his own.

"It was gloriously hot in Miami," she told her friends. "But there were times when I wanted to take off my flesh and sit in my bones."

She was answered by a dark-haired young man with an actor's face, lean, tanned and mobile, with a whimsical mouth, who sat next to her. John noticed that he wore a signet ring on his little finger, and that his clothes fitted him like a glove.

"I bet it was hotter in Washington—I became a grease-spot between the Wardman Park Hotel and the White House. There goes Robert Bramley, I said, when I looked at this dissolution of myself. He used to be a nice fellow before he melted. He had a kind heart and loved not wisely but too well."

There was a squeal of laughter from a young woman sitting two chairs away on Judy's left.

"Robin! You are an ass!" she said.

"America likes extremes," said the fair-haired girl. "If it rains it's a flood. If it snows it's a blizzard. If it's hot it's as hot as Hades. On the whole the dear old English climate has something to say for itself. Grey skies suit us best. That's why we are what we are."

"What are we?" asked the young man with the whimsical mouth. "Looking round this ship and observing my fellow-countrymen and women, I don't like my company. There are some very poisonous people on board, I fear. Look at the Captain's table. Look at our grand old charlatan letting off hot air as usual and giving his latest recipe for saving humanity from all the mess into which he led us twenty years ago when

the little victims played regardless of their doom, which he was carefully arranging for them."

"Anne!" called out the young woman next to Judy. She was a young woman who was certainly sister to the dark fellow with the whimsical face. She had the same humorous mouth and the same features, more delicately cut. "Did I tell you about those Americans who invited us to Long Island next year? They were perfectly priceless. The old man had made a fortune out of chewing-gum or something and wanted us to see his collection of pictures which he had bought from 'impoverished English aristocrats', as he was pleased to call them. I wondered if he had Uncle Dick's Romneys which disappeared from the walls to pay death duties and income-tax. He seemed to think . . ."

She broke off suddenly, and John noticed that the young man next to her had given her a slight nudge of warning with a glance in the direction of John and Judy. He was an elegant young man, not unlike the fair-haired girl who had been called Anne and had talked about the American liking for extremes.

"What did he think, Betty?" asked the girl called Anne.

The other girl answered with a laugh.

"Your diplomatic brother seems to think I'm dropping bricks. He's so used to living in spy-infested countries—"

The dark young man who seemed to have a sense of humour turned the conversation in that quick, restless way which John had noticed before among the English, never allowing anybody to dwell too long on one subject.

"How long did you favour New York with your exquisite beauty, Anne?"

"Three days and nights," she told him. "And quite enough, too. If I had any nerves I should have found it shattering. I went to the top of one of the skyscrapers—the Empire State Building—and looked down on millions of little ants squirming about below, very busy about their lives in the monstrous ant-heap of a termite world. Very amusing to

see for once, but I wouldn't live there for anything on earth. It isn't our idea of civilization, is it?"

"My dear Anne!" the dark young man said. "Does that make it wrong? Is our English idea of civilization altogether a success?"

"I happen to like it," said the girl called Anne. "I hope it won't get Americanized—more than it is already, worse luck. But Robin, darling, do observe that female at the Captain's table. The one next to Lord Brimpton. Her backbone is positively indecent."

"Oh, they seem to me quite good-looking vertebrae," said Robin, after observation.

John listened to this conversation with an occasional word to Judy and an exchange of smiles with her. He felt a slight sense of hostility against that girl Annie, who would rather die than live in New York, and who didn't want to see England Americanized, as though it were a kind of plague. She didn't care a damn if there were Americans at her table listening to her supercilious remarks. Not one of these people had taken the slightest notice of Judy and himself. They two might have been ghosts sitting there invisible to English eyes. Probably they would need to be introduced before they exchanged a word. English ice!

"I saw some remarkably pretty girls in New York," said the young man, who was obviously the brother of the girl Anne. "Marvellous! All as neat as new pins. I can't think how they do it."

"Mass production, my dear David," said Anne. "Mass-produced frocks and mass-produced stockings. Mass-produced complexions."

"I'm all in favour of mass production if it produces those results," said David, in an exaggerated accent which probably belonged to Oxford. "Besides, don't we have the same system in England, rather less efficient?"

The dark man with the whimsical mouth was talking to Judy across the table. Could it be possible that he had broken

the ice by asking her to pass the salt or something? John could hear Judy's answer.

"Well, I've been in England before—but only for a week or two, as I must admit."

"Were your reactions favourable or revolting?" asked the Englishman, with apparent sincerity except for a slight gleam in his eyes. "What was your most striking impression of us?"

"I went crazy about Winchester," said Judy, taking him seriously.

This seemed to be a happy hit. The dark-eyed man seemed to be pleased.

"How discriminating!" he exclaimed. "I happen to have been reared at Winchester—there's a school there, you know. In spite of being flogged with disgusting injustice and bullied abominably by older hooligans, I still pretend that my happiest years were in that ancient city. I still look back to it with almost tearful sentiment."

Suddenly John's eyes met those of the girl called Anne.

"Are you an American?" she asked, with a faint smile meant to be friendly, no doubt.

"A hundred per cent," he told her, answering her smile, but slightly on guard. "Do you object?"

"Not in the least," she assured him, with a glint in her eyes. "Do you suffer from an inferiority complex with regard to that?"

"On the contrary," said John. "I'm a perfectly patriotic citizen of the United States. But I thought, in view of your criticism——"

The girl raised her eyebrows.

"Have I been criticizing? Very foolish of me, if so."

"I overheard your objections to the Americanization of England," said John. "Excuse me, won't you? I was rather interested in your point of view."

"Oh, that!" said the English girl calmly. "Well, I don't withdraw. Skyscrapers are all right, no doubt, in New York,

but I don't want them in London. And personally I dislike seeing the High Streets of old English towns painted red with the scarlet fever of Woolworth's. Does that annoy you?"

"It does not," said John good-humouredly. "I don't regard it as a personal insult, not having shares in that institution. Are there any other American blots on the English landscape?"

She accepted the smiling challenge in his eyes.

"Well," she said, "speaking frankly, you know, and all that, some old-fashioned people don't exactly favour your American films—those about gunmen and crooks—which tend to undermine the morals of our youth; nor those awful crooners who bleat on the B.B.C. about their coal-black mummies and their sunshine Susies. That kind of thing is rather demoralizing, don't you think?"

John Barton was willing to concede that it might clash somewhat with ancient British customs and the melody of early-English folk-songs. But personally he found it possible to resist the demoralization of such influences, seldom going to the cinema and never listening to the radio.

Anne regarded him for a moment with appraising eyes, as though wondering whether it were worth while pursuing this conversation. She decided for the moment that it was not worth while, and gave her attention to Judy's Englishman, who had made a caricature on his table-napkin of the famous English statesman sitting at the Captain's table.

"You'd better hide that!" she told him, after gazing at it mirthfully. "You'll get into trouble, Robin."

"I've a good mind to send it over and ask him to sign it," he said. "I will say the old humbug has a sense of humour."

He beckoned to a steward as though to carry out his threat, against the protests of the party, but asked instead for a glass of cold water, which seemed to the steward, for some reason, a rare joke.

Presently Anne, as they called her, turned to John again, as though rediscovering him.

"Are you staying long in England?" she asked.

John was not quite sure of that himself.

"I'm going to take a look round," he said guardedly. "I'm a newspaper man. A reporter."

He told her that with the idea that it might surprise her to know that an American reporter was a civilized human being.

She raised her eyebrows slightly as though duly surprised, though not shocked.

"Really! That's interesting. Well, I hope you'll report us favourably. The American papers get us all wrong, as far as I've read them now and then. They seem to think we're dodging our responsibilities by refusing to fight most other nations—while the United States keep strictly neutral."

John laughed with real amusement at this indictment.

"Well," he said, "we may have been deceived by recent events in history. Mussolini got away with it all right, didn't he?"

The fair-haired girl looked at him for a moment as though he had scored a doubtful point.

"The French ratted on sanctions" she answered, after a moment's hesitation. "The whole thing was a messy mistake, anyhow. That ridiculous League of Nations . . ."

John Barton as an idealist and an intellectual had a sympathetic allegiance to the League of Nations, and he had the notion, based on good-looking evidence, that England had not supported it with much sincerity except when it was useful to British interests.

"It might have worked all right against a bandit nation," he said, "if England had stood behind it more strongly. That's the American idea. But perhaps we've got it all wrong again."

She answered in the manner of Queen Elizabeth to one of her Ministers who had challenged her opinion.

"I think you have. My father . . ."

She checked herself as though talking with too much familiarity to a strange American.

"Anyhow," she said, after that moment's pause, "wasn't it the States which first let down the League? Didn't they leave the baby on the doorstep at Geneva soon after it was born?"

"*Touché*," said John gallantly. "But it's a long argument, lady."

She was disinclined for that argument, and general conversation at table interfered with it. Judy was laughing rather too much, thought John, watching her with amusement. Her eyes were dancing and she was having a considerable amount of back-chat with the dark-eyed man, who seemed to be entertaining her.

It was almost towards the end of dinner that the fair-haired English girl spoke directly to John again. She turned to him suddenly and lowered her voice:

"Do you mind if I ask you a certain question?" she said mysteriously.

"Go ahead!" he said, wondering if this question might undermine his social poise. He was still watching his stance in English company.

"What do you know about an American lady called Mrs. Simpson?" she asked. "In confidence and all that."

She had put her head very close to his. He could smell the fragrance of a faint perfume. It was rather pleasant.

John knew nothing at all at first-hand about an American lady called Mrs. Simpson. He did not move in her set. He had only read the newspaper chit-chat and listened to conversation which he thought was mostly unreliable.

"There's some talk about a Royal marriage," he told her. "Queen Wallie and all that. The papers are getting excited about it."

"It's stupefying," she said in a low voice. "Not a word is published in England. It simply can't be true. Why do you allow it?"

John denied all responsibility for censorship in the United States. In any case he didn't believe in censorship. It was the

privilege of democracy to have a free Press. Besides, he had heard that Mrs. Simpson was a very charming lady. What was all the trouble about?

"It's just impossible," said the girl called Anne, looking at him darkly as though he had said something very dreadful. She rose from the dinner-table and John stooped down politely to pick up a little vanity-bag which she had dropped.

"Shall we explore the hidden mysteries of this ship?" asked the man Robin, who had entertained Judy so much. "Or shall we dance while Europe goes drifting towards its inevitable doom?"

Judy was for both of these adventures.

V

"Who are our friends?" asked John when Judy joined him for a few minutes in their staterooms.

Judy had learned quite a lot about them. The fair-haired English girl called Anne was Lady Anne Ede. She was with her brother, the Hon. David Ede, the young man who looked like Lancelot, or some other of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. He was in the British Embassy in Rome. The amusing man with the dark hair was Robert Bramley, generally called Robin, who was travelling with his sister Elizabeth, whom they called Betty. He had told Judy that he and his sister were cousins of the other two, on the poverty-stricken side of the family, and lived in a flat over a garage in a London slum, not far from a street called Knightsbridge. Betty served in a manicure shop in Beauchamp Place, and he was a portrait-painter, he had told her, of considerable genius not fully recognized by a barbarous world. He had had serious intentions of trying his luck as a pavement artist at Hyde Park Corner, but had been saved from that ordeal temporarily by a commission to paint the portrait of an American lady in Virginia with whom he and Betty had been staying for a month. She had greatly disliked his masterpiece, which, she said, made her look like a loose woman, and they had parted coldly.

Judy repeated all this with laughing eyes.

"He's quite surprising as an Englishman," she said. "I didn't know the English had a sense of humour."

"Well," said John, "you're very well informed about them all. You would make a perfectly good reporter on the *Observer*. So I take it we're sitting among the blue blood of Old England. That accounts for the haughty spirit of the Lady Anne. I'm not quite sure I like that flower of English beauty."

He smiled in reminiscence of his table conversation, and then put on a cloth cap.

"Well, I'll see you later, Judy. You'll find me on the boat deck, if you're in need of brotherly assistance. Watch your step with those English aristocrats."

He didn't feel like dancing, in spite of Judy's suggestion that it would be only civil to ask Lady Anne to walk the floor with him. He had a sense of the human drama in this ship which was hurrying them across the big grey sea. It amused him to watch his fellow-passengers, and to put them down in his mental note-book. He strolled through the lounges and along the decks for the purpose of social study. The little film star, Sophie Steinach, was sipping some golden liquid in the American bar with several young men who were telling Hollywood stories. He knew their stories. He knew their type. Nothing new to be learned from them. The handsome Englishman with the monocle on a cord was sitting with his pretty wife in a group which included the elder statesman who had been caricatured by Judy's table companion.

"The world," said the elder statesman, "is rushing to destruction while our so-called National Government sits twiddling its fingers and pretending that everything is quite all right as long as the country remains loyal to Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin."

The handsome Englishman frowned slightly at the speaker, whose words had been greeted by a little gust of laughter from the other members of the group. Among them were some of the English lords and military, who made strange noises in their throats like sea-lions being fed. It was due, John thought, to suppressed laughter.

"If only the Labour Party wouldn't talk such bilge," he

said, "we should get on rather better. And if it hadn't been for Mr. Baldwin we should now be fighting a first-class war with Italy with second-class armaments. Who, may I ask, is responsible for our present weakness in naval and military strength? I suggest that we've been let down by the so-called intellectual and professional pacifists who now clamour for war on all fronts."

"Your suggestion, my dear fellow," said the elder statesman good-humouredly, "is characteristic of your type of mind, moulded in our public schools and likely to lead our country into the Dark Pit. We must either stand up against the dictators or go down in ignominy with the loss of all our precious heritage of liberty."

"I don't believe in liberty as interpreted by soap-box orators. I believe in duty and discipline."

John Barton listened to this dialogue and then passed on. It sounded interesting. He regretted that he could not follow the argument further. It might be very revealing of English character and ideas.

There was an emotional episode in progress on the upper deck, where a young man and woman in evening clothes stood very close together outside the wireless-room.

"It's no good, Julian," said the girl. "The end of this voyage must be the end of all things, as far as we're concerned."

"No," said the man, "I want it to be the beginning of all things. You can't just fling my love away like an empty cigarette-tin."

He stopped talking when he heard John's slow step coming close to him.

"I dare say there's a lot of human passion on the *Queen Mary*," thought John. "A ship like this is like a small world of its own. If I could get the life-story of every passenger I should have material for a hundred novels as long as those of Sinclair Lewis."

In the card-room Bridge was being played at a number of tables. John observed that the smart young man he had met

on a visit to Sing Sing was playing with two elderly Englishmen and a foreign-looking fellow with a black moustache under a vulturine nose. The two Englishmen, he thought, were likely to be out of pocket before the trip was over.

He observed for a moment a group of Japanese talking in low voices. They were all very obsequious and reverential to one of their number—an elderly man with a completely bald head and a face like an Oriental ivory. They had been on some mission to the United States, no doubt. Probably they had been doing big business with the arms manufacturers, who were very pleased to sell their latest gadgets of destruction for the slaughter of Chinese women and children, just as they had been doing good business with Chinese generals for the defence of China against Japanese aggression. Strictly impartial to both sides!

A sibilant "S" came to the ears of John Barton from groups of American and English women sitting about after dinner. It was spoken with lowered voices and glances round about in case of being overheard. It was the sibilant "S" of a lady's name.

"Mrs. S . . ."

"My dear, it's too terrible!" said an elderly English woman, failing to lower her voice. "I can't think what will happen."

"If I were you I wouldn't," said a white-haired soldierly-looking man who sat next to her in a low arm-chair. "It's all nonsense. American journalism. Disgraceful!"

"They seem worried about the lady," thought John. He wasn't worrying. It seemed to him an excellent idea that Edward Eight should marry an American. It would be very helpful to Anglo-American relations.

He went up to the boat deck and leaned over the rail of the *Queen Mary*, watching the glamorous effect of moonlight on a perfectly smooth sea. There was a long white pathway of light in the wake of the ship. Above her funnels in a sky with racing clouds a full moon looked down upon the watery waste.

The engines of the *Queen Mary* were vibrating with hidden and enormous power. John felt the quiver of them as he leaned over the rail.

"Glorious, isn't it!" said a voice by his side, a rather pleasant English voice.

"I'll say it's good," admitted John, glancing sideways and seeing the gleam of a shirt-front and then the profile of a hatchet-faced man with a high forehead.

There was silence between them for a few minutes until John opened conversation again.

"Quite a light from that moon," he said.

The Englishman gave a quiet laugh.

"It looks down upon a mad world, doesn't it?"

"More mad than in previous history?" asked John, pleased to be conversational.

The Englishman thought that out for a moment.

"I'm inclined to think so," he answered. "Certainly the old moon has looked down on some pretty frightful history all through the record of our human struggle. The martyrdom of man has gone on from age to age. But human intelligence gave us a certain hope from time to time. We saw light ahead. We struggled towards it. We established certain laws and agreed about certain ideals. It rather looked for a time as though we were moving forward. Nowadays that old moon looks down upon chaos and lawlessness in many lands."

John Barton looked at the man by his side. The moon touched his profile from his high forehead to the tip of a raking chin. It put heavy shadows under deep-set eyes.

"When do you expect the next war to begin?" asked John.

Somewhat to his surprise the man laughed again.

"Good Lord!" he said, "don't put it like that. I'm still hoping we shall avoid the next war. I saw enough of the last. I'm still banking on the belief that nobody wants it—certainly none of those millions of men in all European countries who went through the misery of eighteen years ago."

John ventured to express a doubt.

"Aren't the dictatorships heading for war? In the United States we have the idea that Hitler is not exactly the apostle of peace. His programme, as outlined in *Mein Kampf*, doesn't seem reassuring to the American mind. Then there's that guy Mussolini. . . ."

The Englishman gave a little groan and he laughed uneasily.

"I agree that it's all very dangerous. But I refuse to believe that another world war is inevitable. There's still time to avoid it, if only our politicians would work for peace instead of drifting towards the rocks, with a kind of blind fatalism. We've made many mistakes lately. Terrible, really!"

"In the United States," said John, in his candid way, "we have an idea that England is losing grip. I hope that's wrong. I should be very glad if we have been misinformed on that point."

The ascetic-looking Englishman looked at him sideways as though startled by these remarks.

"England is not easy to know," he said cautiously. "The spirit of our people moves in mysterious ways, but it's very traditional and has great reserves of strength. At the moment we're fumbling. But I'm not a politician, thank God! I am only a bewildered looker-on of the human puppet play. You're an American, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," said John cheerily.

"Well, you're lucky," said the Englishman. "Poison gas is never likely to creep down the streets of New York. Bombing aeroplanes won't threaten to destroy your architecture, or mutilate your women and children. In England we're getting rather anxious."

As he spoke there came up faintly but clearly the music of the ship's band playing an American jazz tune of the year before last. From another part of the deck came the sound of women's laughter. It seemed a contradiction of the melancholy words uttered by the hatchet-faced Englishman, and he was aware of it.

"Perhaps I exaggerate," he said more cheerfully. "Our fellow-passengers don't seem to be worrying about world affairs!"

The conversation on world affairs was interrupted by Judy, who came up to the boat deck and put her hand on her brother's arm.

"John!" she cried. "How unsociable you are! I want you to dance with Lady Anne."

John took her arm and turned to the Englishman.

"I would like to have you meet my sister Judith, commonly called Judy," he said. "Judy, I would like to introduce you to . . ."

The Englishman supplied the name.

"Peter Langdon."

John stared at him in the moonlight with humorous surprise.

"Well, now," he exclaimed, "it's a great pleasure for us to meet you, Mr. Langdon! I first began to read your books when I was at Harvard. I've gone on reading them. And Judy here is one of your devoted admirers."

"Yes, indeed!" said Judy excitedly. "This is a real honour, Mr. Langdon."

Mr. Langdon looked embarrassed at this enthusiasm from an American brother and sister. He laughed uneasily as he took Judy's hand, which gave him a firm, friendly clasp.

"I hope I haven't led you astray by anything I've written," he said, in the self-conscious English manner. "I don't much like my own books when they're published."

Judy gave this modest author a few enthusiastic words.

"I was crazy about *The Secret Trail*. I read it out to my father and mother in Massachusetts and we were all very much moved by it. We liked your plea for peace."

Peter Langdon, the novelist, laughed uneasily again, as though this appreciation of his work caused him acute discomfort.

"Oh, well," he said, "it's very nice of you to say so. But I must be turning in now. Good night!"

He raised one hand in salute and hurried away.

"Oh, John," said Judy, "to think that we should have the good fortune to meet Peter Langdon in the flesh! This is going to be a great trip."

"You bet it is," said John cheerfully. "I've been learning quite a lot to-night. How have you been getting on with the English nobility and gentry?"

"Fine!" said Judy. "I've fallen in love with Lady Anne. She's sweet when you get to know her."

"I haven't got to know her," said John. "But don't you go falling in love with any black-eyed fellow who is probably a crook on the look-out for a real American heiress."

Judy laughed gaily at this joke, which was very absurd in view of trade depression and parental anxieties.

"Didn't I tell you I was a predestined spinster?" she asked.

"You did, honey," said John, "and I didn't believe you. I shall have to keep a careful eye on you. A sea voyage does strange things, I'm told, to one's psychological make-up. It loosens one's inhibitions. A ship is a kind of No Man's Land floating between two worlds and not subject to the usual laws of morality and self-discipline."

"What's all that nonsense you're talking?" laughed Judy, tucking her hand through his arm.

"I've just made it up," he told her. "I think it will be the text of my first article for the *Observer* after losing sight of *terra firma*. Meanwhile I could do with a little drink below deck, surrounded by English peers and their barebacked dames. Isn't life wonderful?"

VI

It was all very amusing in this great ship on a smooth sea, whose passengers might have forgotten that they were in any ship at all but for the vibration and the occasional glimpse of water through deck windows and portholes. It was a moving palace of luxury in which it was easy to get lost without a sense of naval architecture or a steward's friendly guidance.

John's steward was a thin-faced Cockney who did not look old enough to have been in the World War eighteen years before, but lingered now and then to answer John's questions on that and other subjects.

He had been in the trenches, he said, for three and a half years. And he didn't want any more of that kind of thing. If there was another war, he said, they wouldn't get him again, not if the King himself came to Stepney and said, "Alf, old boy, we want you!" In his opinion, as far as John could understand his Cockney English, the last war had been a great swindle for everyone, and they had fought the wrong people. When he was on the Rhine, after the Armistice, he had been billeted in a German house and found the Germans were quite human. So human were they that the buxom Frau, who had three flaxen-haired daughters, used to bring him a cup of tea in the morning before he shaved himself. "Why go and fight people like that?" he asked.

"Supposing they come and fight you?" asked John, hiding his amusement. "Supposing they want to grab things you don't want to give up, or other people's countries which you're pledged to defend without loss of honour?"

Alfred Jenkins made a grimace as though the word honour had given him a nasty taste in the mouth.

"We 'ad too much of that talk in the last war," he said. "Propaganda to delude the masses into fighting for a quarrel which wasn't theirs and being blown to bits for reasons which were mostly wrong. What did we get out of it? That's what I ask. 'To make the world safe for democracy!' they said. Well, democracy don't seem to be much safer as far as I can make out. Not that I'm a Bolshevik, mind you! I did my bit, and I've no use for Bolshies and red revolution. What I say is 'Live and let live'. If it weren't for the newspapers and politicians . . ."

His remarks on that subject were cut short by the call of an infuriated English colonel in the stateroom next to John's, who could hear him gargling and making throaty noises.

"Steward . . . Stew—ard! Where the devil——"

Alfred Jenkins gave a meaningful wink at John before departing.

"I'll cop it!" he said. "He wants his morning cup of tea. You know the type. Colonel Blimp!"

The name of Colonel Blimp did not mean anything to John at that time, not yet acquainted with the caricatures of a genius named Low.

Judy was enjoying herself and John was proud of her social success. She had made friends all round the ship, taking part in the deck games and attracting her fellow passengers by her vivacity and lack of self-consciousness. The sense of being cramped at home had left her and she was putting in a very good time with the English set.

John was persuaded now and then to play deck tennis with Lady Anne and her party. His first experience had been a trifle disconcerting to him. Lady Anne had flung her rubber ring at him with a velocity which was alarming and untouchable. She was dressed in a light-blue polo shirt and dark-blue trousers, and played around the deck in bare feet. She laughed at him when he failed to take her serve and called out, "Hard

luck, Mr. American!" One of her serves skimming across the rope cracked one of his finger-nails and she called out "Sorry!" when he stopped to attend to it for a second. He didn't believe she was sorry. That word seemed to be one of the English affectations. They said "Sorry!" when they got in a good shot against an opponent. They said "Sorry!" when they won a game by a well-scored point.

"That's all right, lady," said John to himself. "You'll be sorry when I've had a little more practice. I used to play a fair game at baseball. This is child's play."

He put in some practice with Judy before breakfast once or twice and some more with young David Ede, whom he beat easily after three games.

"You're in good form," said young Ede good-humouredly. "You've got your eye in."

He told his sister at lunch and exaggerated his defeat.

"Barton wiped the floor with me at deck tennis this morning. I hadn't a look in."

"Well, I wouldn't say that," said John. "It took me all my time to win that last point."

"I'll challenge you to a singles," said Lady Anne. "England versus the United States. How about three-fifteen, after the process of digestion has had a chance?"

"Fine!" said John. "I shall be there. Any money on it?"

"We play for the game," said Lady Anne.

He took that as a rebuke to the American habit of betting on a game. She had taken his suggestion too seriously, whereas he meant it as a joke. One of his *gaffes*!

"That's quite all right with me," he told her.

Robert Bramley the humorist, relieved the situation for John by a question across the table to young Ede.

"How about it, David? Care to make a book? I'll lay five to two on the lady. Five to two on Anne. Five to two on the field."

He gave a very good imitation of an English bookie at Epsom, hoarse by constant shouting of the odds.

"Nothing doing," said young Ede. "I never bet against the family, being a loyalist."

"Thank you, David," said Anne. "*Semper fidelis* and all that."

"God bless Mrs. Baldwin," said Bramley with great irrelevance.

"Don't be an ass, Robin!" cried Betty, who was otherwise Elizabeth Bramley, manicurist in Beauchamp Place, according to information received. She seemed to enjoy her brother's jokes and was in a constant splutter of amusement when he gave tongue. It was the second time she had called him an ass at table and he protested against this repetition.

"You malign that poor beast, my child. I belong to a more ferocious species of animal, namely *homo sapiens*, whom God forgive, because I cannot, knowing too much of his iniquities."

"Tell me," said young Ede suddenly to John, as though a thought had come to him by association of ideas, "what is your considered opinion of Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal?"

"Well," said John, playing for time.

There was much he wanted to say about Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal. He was an enthusiast on that subject, and very ready to give as much information as he had to an enquiring Englishman. But he was not allowed to give much. These English, he observed, not for the first time, were not good listeners. Their thoughts seemed to stray. They were impatient of anything in the nature of a monologue. He was interrupted in his preliminary remarks, favourable to Mr. Roosevelt, by Lady Anne Ede.

"I say," she said, "why do the Hollywood stars go on marrying different husbands and wives with such a devotion to the marriage service? Isn't it rather farcical to plight their troth for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part, when they're taking on their fourth husband or fifth wife? Why marry? Why not keep a mistress, or be

kept, and so be honest about it, if they must go on changing partners like that?"

It was Judy who gave the explanation with much gravity belied by her laughing eyes.

"The Puritan tradition reaches as far as Hollywood, Lady Anne. We're still loyal to the moralities of the Pilgrim Fathers."

"Nicely answered," said Robert Bramley. "Heaven knows that in England we are apt to cover our misdeeds under the cloak of virtue and high moral purpose. In the Victorian era we advanced upon native tribes with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other and seized their country in the sacred name of civilization and the blessings of Christianity."

"We took justice and liberty as well," said Lady Anne. "Don't run down your own country, Robin, like one of our parlour Bolshies in Bloomsbury. It's getting to be a habit of yours, I'm afraid."

"I protest," said Robert (called Robin), making himself look like an outraged politician. "Ladies and gentlemen, I refute the libellous charge brought against me by my political opponent on the Opposition Front Bench. I am a patriot! I believe in my country, right or wrong, and especially when wrong. Believe me when I say . . ."

So they went on kidding each other, as John called it to himself, never pursuing one subject, always interrupting each other, laughing unduly at small jokes. Certainly they did not seem to be worried by the thought of an impending war, like Peter Langdon the novelist, with whom he had been pacing the deck that morning.

"Don't forget three-fifteen," said Anne Ede, when she rose from the luncheon-table.

"I will not," said John. "It's going to be a duel and I can't say I feel safe."

She rewarded those last words with a smile.

"David tells me you're pretty good," she said. "Well, we're not playing on the centre court at Wimbledon."

John took a nap in his stateroom after lunch and then roused himself with a yawn.

"Hullo, Judy!" he called out. "Coming to see me take down the pride of her haughty ladyship? I hope to give her a whopping."

He could hear Judy's laugh from the next room.

"Aren't you taking it too seriously, John? Where's your sense of humour?"

"It's here all right," answered John. "My most precious possession."

But he was taking this game a little too seriously, as he was faintly aware. Was it an inferiority complex at work in the presence of this flower of English beauty, as he called her, who looked at him sometimes as though his clothes were un-English and therefore wrong, and who, once, had exchanged a secret smile with that girl Betty when he pronounced the word schedule as skedule, and who had all the English prejudices against the United States? As though what happened in Hollywood were typical of American life and morals!

Robert Bramley had come up with his sister and David Ede to see the game. There were a few other passengers on that part of the deck roped off for games. Lady Anne appeared five minutes late in her polo shirt and blue trousers.

"Feeling nervous?" she asked John, with a smile which was very attractive and at the same time very annoying.

"You bet!" he answered enigmatically.

John had developed a swift serve which skimmed across the rope with a flat trajectory.

"Pretty good!" called out Anne Ede, when she failed to take it.

She took the second shot and returned it with a skilful wobble to a corner beyond John's reach. Her footwork was excellent, he noticed. She had the swiftness and grace of a young greyhound. Once she leapt up and caught a high-flung ring and swung it back like a flash of lightning, not to be returned.

"If I beat this girl I shall be lucky," thought John. "She's darned quick."

"Sorry!" she cried with a laugh when she shot him full in the chest with her next serve.

"Quite all right, Lady Anne," said John. "Coming over."

He beat her seven games to five after a hard tussle, and felt faintly embarrassed after his victory. He had played too hard, he thought, as though for a challenge cup between England and the United States.

"Well done, Stars and Stripes!" said Lady Anne, holding out her hand across the rope. "I had no idea you were so good. But I gave you a good run for your money, didn't I?"

"You certainly did," said John heartily. "I enjoyed it a lot."

She didn't show the faintest sign of humiliation or disappointment. She was proud of her English sportsmanship, he supposed—long training in the tradition of good form. Well, Americans could take a beating just as well, couldn't they? Still, he liked her better now that she had taken a beating without being ruffled.

After five minutes' rest she suggested having a foursome with the others.

"I'll be your partner this time," she told him. "Less exhausting!"

He could not help feeling flattered. She could be quite civil sometimes, this Lady Anne. Judy had taken a fancy to her, and Judy was a fine judge of character. Perhaps he had not become attuned to the English accent and the English manner. That fellow David Ede, her brother, was quite thoughtful and knowledgeable, he found. They had had a talk about foreign affairs. He was in the British Embassy in Rome but expected to be moved shortly to Vienna or Berlin. He thought Mussolini had done a lot for Italy up to the invasion of Abyssinia, which was still a heavy strain on his resources. The policy of sanctions, he thought, had been a

mistake, as it could only be enforced by war, for which England was not at all ready or willing.

He had looked startled for a moment by one of John's questions following this remark.

"Won't England have to make up her mind to fight for democracy?" he had asked, "or go down before the dictatorships?"

"How do you define democracy?" he had asked. "And what do you mean by dictatorship?"

He was hedging, of course, as a junior diplomat. It was all very amusing to an American observer. These English didn't give themselves away. They wore masks, as Mr. Lansing had told him.

VII

MISS JUDITH BARTON, of Massachusetts, enjoyed her trip on the *Queen Mary* with occasional pangs of conscience when she thought of the deplorable state of affairs which must be prevailing at home without her watchful eyes and helping hands. How would the beds get made while Mrs. Cassidy was sweeping up? Who would give orders on the telephone when her mother was in Boston attending classes in Yogi? Who would see that her father changed his socks when he got wet? Who would make coffee when the Fevershams and other friends came round? Mrs. Cassidy's attempts to make coffee were simply hopeless. She produced something like poison.

"I've been terribly selfish," thought Judy, "but I must say I'm enjoying myself, and of course I shall have to look after John. That's one comfort—he wants a lot of looking after."

She could not imagine how he had looked after himself in New York as a lonely reporter. From his stateroom now he called to her to make his black tie look more like a black tie than a shoelace. He called to her again in distress because he failed to find his best pair of cuff-links and became panic-stricken with the idea that he had left them in New York. Then his manners with the English passengers were not quite correct, she thought, and he needed an occasional warning because he was so blunt in his way of speech, and so ready to take offence when none was meant, as she was quite sure. He

resented the slightest word of criticism of the United States, even when it was meant only as a joke. He didn't realize that teasing—what they called “leg-pulling”—was an English habit, and that the American accent and pronunciation of certain words seemed just as funny to English ears as the English accent seemed silly and affected to Americans until they became used to it. She really must teach him to be more tolerant of English manners and break down his suspicion that some of these English people, like Lady Anne and Mr. Bramley, were supercilious and conceited. They were very friendly really and it was quite natural of them, she thought, to misunderstand the American point of view now and then. How could they know? Lady Anne went out of her way to be sweet to her and talked quite simply about her own people, not putting on edge because her father was in the House of Lords. In fact she had explained that they were all “stony-broke” and that the old landed gentry of England were finding it hard to make both ends meet because of income tax and death duties.

“My father,” she said once, “was foolish enough to indulge in a large family, and he really can't afford us all, especially as some of us are expensive luxuries.”

She was seriously intending to look round for some kind of job to ease the financial situation.

Judy regretted that the *Queen Mary* was such a fast ship. She would have preferred a longer voyage so as to know these people better and to do all the things which somehow she had to leave undone. She hadn't read a word, for instance, of a book on English life which she had carefully packed because Diana Feversham had gone crazy about it as the most amusing and informative book on England. She hadn't even written more than half a dozen postal cards to be posted in England to her friends in Massachusetts who had sent telegrams to the ship. In fact she felt thoroughly demoralized because of this life on board ship, which, as John had said, was like an adventure between two worlds.

She was always being wanted by English and American friends for some new game or amusement and she hadn't the strength of mind to refuse, while John was talking earnestly about the ship with people with whom he had made acquaintance—an English film producer, one of Mr. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" on his way to study economic conditions in Germany, American women who had read his articles in the *Observer* and thought them wonderful, the American military attaché in London, an English newspaper man, a French financier, and Peter Langdon, the novelist with whom he had become friendly and conversational.

It was nice to be liked. Judy was astonished that her fellow passengers liked her, or at least were very kind to her. She wasn't a beauty or anything like that. She had already learnt all that the mirror could tell her and it wasn't flattering. She couldn't compete in a beauty contest with Sophie Steinach or with other American girls on board, some of whom were lovely. She was, she knew, just a plain Judy from Massachusetts with more knowledge of household duties than world affairs or social life. Some of these English seemed to have been everywhere and to know everybody. Lady Anne had been to Paris, Rome, Berlin, Budapest, Cairo and other places of which Judy had only read in books and visited in imagination. Elizabeth Bramley had been to India with her father and mother and had been entertained by Indian princes, although now she was a manicurist and lived in a "slum". They talked about all these places and peoples in a casual way as though they were just round the corner, while she sat listening like a schoolgirl, although she was twenty-eight and getting old.

Why did they want her company? she wondered. It was really their kindness, or perhaps there was something in her American way of speech which amused them. Robert Bramley, the painter, had suggested that one evening when she was dancing with him.

"I find American girls stimulating," he said. "I suppose

it's because they haven't that carefully trained self-suppression which makes so many English girls completely idiotic. Their only adjective is 'priceless'. Their highest praise is 'How amusing!' They giggle instead of laughing. I find some of them very trying, though I have a kind heart."

"Aren't you too critical of your own folk?" asked Judy. "Does that go with a kind heart?"

"There now!" he said. "You take my serve with a sharp return over the net. An English girl would have giggled and fumbled the ball. You challenge the kindness of my heart and instantly raise an interesting argument full of psychological interest, with a delightful opportunity for self-analysis. The fact is, Miss Judy Barton, I am an embittered man. So far from having any kindness in my heart, it is soaked in gall and wormwood. I tell you so because I think you have already discovered my dark secret with your frank and searching eyes."

"What has soured you?" asked Judy, laughing over his shoulder.

"I'm a portrait-painter," he said. "I ought to have been a piano-tuner. As a painter I'm perfectly foul, but I have an ear for music. Don't tell anyone, will you?"

"I should like to see some of your work," said Judy. "Any chance some day?"

"Why not?" answered Robert Bramley. "Let's make an assignation. My sister Betty is out from half past nine till six, polishing the finger-nails of degenerate youth. I brew a poisonous cup of tea each afternoon at four o'clock. I shall open the door if you give the secret password, which is known only to my dearest friends."

"I'll remember it if you tell me," said Judy.

Robert Bramley told her the password admitting her to secret rites.

"*Ars est celare artem.* That means an ass eats celery and has no use for art, unless he's a greater ass than he looks. Are you good with ancient tongues?"

Judy admitted that she had learnt Latin at Smith's College.

"Does your translation apply to females?" she enquired.

He stared at her with apparent apprehension.

"What is the meaning of that sinister question?" he asked.

Judy revealed one of her own secrets.

"I've been trying to paint pictures for quite a time. I'm a female painter!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Robert Bramley. "And I thought I was dancing with a simple maid of Massachusetts. Now I find she's a sister in sin!"

Judy ventured to ask a personal question.

"Are you a typical Englishman by any chance? If so, I've been misinformed."

Robert endeavoured to enlighten her.

"My dear daughter of the Pilgrim Fathers, let me give you a little information on your approach to England. There's no such thing as a typical Englishman. We're a nation of eccentrics. That's why we're never understood by foreigners. They think we live by tradition and have an established code of manners and morals, turned out in the same mould. That's the complete opposite of the real truth. It's true we make faces which look very much alike in their dull absurdity. In our minds we're all different. That's because we live in solitude with ourselves. The Englishman is a lone dog. He doesn't hunt in packs. He slinks into his hovel, or semi-detached villa, or his ancestral mansion, and devises childish hobbies for himself which he keeps secret from public knowledge and his next-door neighbour. He works out his own philosophy of life and establishes his own relations with his own God. That's why we have so many fancy religions. That's why we surprise our friends and enemies. We throw up odd forms of genius and idiosyncrasies. We regard our hobbies as more important than our work or fortunes. Wars, revolutions, financial crises are to us only foolish interruptions of our ball games, our gardening, or our collections of rare stamps, old prints, match-boxes, butterflies and moths, or

antique furniture. That keeps us sane in our whimsical way when the world goes mad and bad. They think us hypocritical or treacherous because we're so wise in our folly. We compromise in all serious affairs of life because they seem so trivial compared with that secret life of ours inside ourselves. Pardon me for this monologue, woman. I'm revealing to you much that is hidden from the ordinary mind."

"Thanks," said Judy. "May I pass it on to John? It might put him wise in his approaching study of English life."

He felt her body quiver with a hidden mirth as he piloted her over the dancing-floor of the *Queen Mary*.

Robert Bramley answered her as though interested by this suggestion regarding her brother.

"It might be useful to an American reporter," he said. "Any commission or exclusive information about the latest society scandals—all Betty's loose young women who come round to our slum for alcohol and dope?"

Judy turned down that offer.

"I'm afraid John is too serious for that," she told him. "He's more interested in England's foreign policy and social conditions."

"Good!" said Bramley, not to be put off by that objection. "I can be of use to him. I have a friend who is the secretary of a secretary to a Secretary of State. He might pinch the carbon copies of Anthony Eden's despatches and decode secret cables from our embassies abroad. Strictly on business terms, of course. What about a hundred dollars for a secret treaty?"

Judy saw the nonsense in his eyes.

"Wouldn't you get into trouble if you talked like that in Italy or Germany?" she asked. "They might take you seriously, maybe."

He admitted that there was something, after all, in being an Englishman, however humble or embittered. In spite of many lost liberties, he could still talk nonsense without danger of being swiped over the head in a concentration camp.

"We Americans have the same privilege," Judy reminded

him. "Yes, sir! We're a democratic people and jealous of our liberties as laid down in the American Constitution."

"You surprise me!" exclaimed Bramley, twitching his dark eyebrows. "I'd no idea that liberty existed in the United States. What about your Ku Klux Klan? What about your Tammany Hall? What about all your moral, racial and social taboos?"

Judy gave him a tap on the shoulder as they danced.

"Now," she warned him, "don't you try to make me mad by running down the American Constitution. One of my forefathers helped to make it."

"He must have been shortsighted," suggested Bramley. "The poor old fellow probably lost his horn-rimmed glasses when landing from the *Mayflower*."

John would have resented this. John would have taken it for an insult. But Judy laughed, knowing that he was just trying to make her mad with him.

"You English are very well pleased with yourselves, aren't you?" she asked, with an air of innocence. "That's fine for you."

"My dear Miss Barton," he answered, with apparent sincerity, though she was never certain of that, "it's only a pose of ours, this bluff of self-satisfaction. We know that we're drifting behind on this evolutionary tide. We keep on singing 'Britannia, Rule the Waves', although we know that our fleet is rotten and all our best officers have been axed out of the Service. We sing 'Land of Hope and Glory' at the Aldershot Tattoo—one of our religious rites—turning our backs on the depressed areas, which are neither hopeful nor glorious. We know that Germany is arming feverishly in double shifts with very aggressive intentions while our little army of amateurs keep on watching football matches and walking out with their young women as though peace would be perpetual. Inside ourselves we're quaking with terror, but we keep on smiling and making the right faces. Don't tell your brother. He might send it to his paper. All this is in strict confidence."

Was he serious? Judy wasn't sure. He spoke always in that same fantastic way with a gleam of humour in his dark eyes. She found him very odd and amusing, and was surprised again that he should like to talk to her so much when there were pretty girls within reach and many more attractive people than herself in the *Queen Mary's* lounge chairs.

One of them surely was Peter Langdon, the novelist, who had become very friendly with John, in spite of his shyness, which was almost painful. He lived in London and had a son at Oxford. He had been an ardent supporter of the League of Nations, and was stricken by the blow which had befallen it owing to the failure of sanctions against Italy. He hated the idea of another war with passionate intensity, partly because, he confessed, he didn't want his son to get mangled, or blinded, or choked by poison gas. He agreed with John that European democracies ought to stand together in defence of liberty against the menace of the new dictatorships, but, like most Englishmen, it seemed, hesitated to call their bluff lest it should lead to the war he wanted to avoid.

"It makes me laugh!" said John in the privacy of his study when Judy sat on the side of his bed while waiting for the bugler to summon them to dinner. "These English are all trying to dodge realities as far as I can make out. Not one of them I've talked to will admit that a European war is imminent. They all think the black clouds will pass away by some magic incantations addressed to Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini. And some of them—Langdon, for instance—reveal an illusory hope that the United States will help to pull the English chestnuts out of the fire. They can't believe that we shall stand by strictly neutral, and that while Mr. Roosevelt rebukes the dictators he is kept busy signing new neutrality laws to prevent any interference with European quarrels."

Judy listened to this speech doubtfully.

"Yes, but, John, you don't agree with that, do you? Isn't it very selfish of us to insist on isolation, even if the rest of the world goes up in smoke and flames?"

John hedged somewhat. He had never been enthusiastic about American isolation.

"I didn't say I agreed, Judy, but I'm a reporter of facts. Facts are stubborn things, as the poet sayeth, though I can't remember for the moment which poet. Was it Shakespeare or Martin Tupper?"

"John," said Judy presently, with some emotion, "I'm sorry this is our last evening in the *Queen Mary*. We've met such pleasant people. They've all been so terribly kind to us. And it has all passed so quickly, like a pleasant dream."

John was using a shoe-horn to put on his evening shoes. He looked up quizzically.

"Why not put it the other way round?" he asked. "Haven't we been terribly kind to them? Why this inferiority complex? I think of all the information I've given to enquiring Englishmen about economic conditions in the United States!"

Judy would not be robbed of her sentiment.

"We've had a great time," she said. "I shall always remember it. We've made many nice friends, but maybe we shan't see them again. I've always heard that ships' friendships end at the docks."

John put on what he called a white "vest", which Englishmen call a waistcoat. He looked at her through the mirror over his wash-basin.

"You're the most popular lady on this ship," he told her with some pride in the fact. "England is going to fall in love with you, lady!"

Judy said she was going to fall in love with England.

"I had no idea you were so alluring to your fellow travelers in this vale of tears," continued John. "Every time I pass you on the decks or in the lounges I find you heavily engaged with some admirer, male or female. That humorist Bramley goes to fantastic lengths to get a laugh out of you."

Judy blushed a little at these observations.

"They want to be kind," she said.

John didn't think that they went out of their way to be

kind. "Lady Anne is as hard as tempered steel. She was very unkind to me at lunch to-day and flashed a glance at me which was meant to kill. It was when I said that Nelson's watchword ought to be rewritten: 'England expects every other man to do his duty'."

Judy thought that that was not quite polite, anyhow.

"It was a come-back," said John. "It was when she said that American idealism stopped short at co-operation for world peace. She accused us of adopting a moral attitude towards Europe unjustified by the kidnapping of babies and the exploits of gunmen."

"You two!" exclaimed Judy. "You can't sit down at table for five minutes without getting into an argument."

John laughed at this accusation.

"That flower of English beauty amuses me a good deal," he said. "She stands for caste in a world which has no place for it. She's a Lady Disdain in a time when democracy has broken through the gates of rank and privilege. She adopts the attitude of Marie Antoinette a hundred and fifty years after the French Revolution. She's a lovely anachronism."

"I wish you liked her," said Judy, rising from his bed and shaking the fold of her frock. "She wants us to call on her in London."

"That's perfectly all right with me," said John. "She's nice to look at. I don't mind seeing her now and then. But I expect we shall quarrel again this evening while the band plays 'Patience' and other old English airs."

The bugler played "The Roast Beef of Old England" down B deck and John laughed again.

"Come on, Judy, I shall never hear that tune without getting hungry."

He avoided a quarrel with Lady Anne, who was quite interesting about the coming coronation of King Edward VIII, and explained the ancient ceremonies, which she had been reading up. But once, in a low voice, she made an astonishing remark.

"I wonder if Edward will ever get crowned?"

"Why not?" he asked. "Any hitch?"

"I am getting a bit nervous," she told him. "Dreadful premonitions."

"I guess he'll make a very popular king," said John. "In the United States we like his democratic viewpoint."

She looked at him for a moment as though wondering what he meant by that, and then changed the conversation abruptly, as she often did.

"Isn't it a bore having to pack up? David, I want you to take some of my books; I shan't be able to squeeze them into my bags without bursting them."

David suggested that she might throw them overboard or give them to the steward. They were mostly thrillers of no permanent value.

On board the *Queen Mary* there was that usual restlessness of passengers on the last night of the trip. Newly made friends exchanged cards and compliments. Inexperienced travellers consulted each other on the subject of tips to stewards and deck-hands.

"Why can't people sit still and keep quiet?" asked the handsome Englishman with the monocle whom John had observed on the first day out.

He was playing a game of chess in the coffee-room with the American military attaché, with whom John had made himself acquainted and from whom he had learnt the name of the distinguished-looking man. He was the Earl of Munstead, formerly captain in the Royal Dragoons.

Judy came to bed late that night, having had farewell talks with English and Americans all round the ship.

"Hullo, Judy!" said John, doing some preliminary packing in his shirt-sleeves. "I thought I should have to send out a search-party."

Judy had shining eyes.

"John! To-morrow we land in England. Aren't you excited?"

He was faintly excited at this thought. It would be a great experience, he expected. He wouldn't begin to write about it too soon. He would have to get a few blue prints of the social and political lay-out. England! Well, he had read a lot about it. In a way, to a Massachusetts man, it was like going to the old folk at home, going back to the beginning of history which Americans of the old stock shared, going back in time to an older civilization from which his own forefathers had come. Somewhere in Devonshire lay their bones. Somewhere in England, maybe, their spirit lingered. England, after all, was part of his own heritage. Yes, he felt faintly and pleasurably excited on this first trip to little old England.

VIII

So this was England! On the journey from Southampton John Barton, who was to report English history day by day, made a few mental notes of first impressions. They were not unfavourable, but it was all very miniature, and rather absurdly like old pictures and prints and coloured illustrations in old books on his father's shelves. The engine of the train which took them to London had made him smile, looking so small compared with the big American engines, but the Pullman car was luxurious, even judged by the standard of American long-distance drawing-room cars, and the train travelled very smoothly, he noticed. Through its windows he had a look at the English scene, all very neat and park-like, with hedges round the fields and gardens to every house. There was no untidiness or undeveloped look. As the train went on its way his eyes rested on old farmhouses and cottages with thatched roofs and timbered walls. Villages with small houses clustered round a church with spires or squat towers. He could see old mansions here and there with walled gardens and cut hedges. There were flowers everywhere in the neighbourhood of these habitations, and the trees and grass were very fresh and green.

"I'd like to do some walking in this countryside," thought John. "Judy and I must walk about a bit and stay at old inns and get in touch with these country folk."

In the Pullman car were some of the passengers from the *Queen Mary*, mostly English. They had all bought copies of that day's *Times* and *Evening Standard*, and had not been

conversational with John and Judy, who had a little table to themselves.

"It's going to be wonderful," Judy had remarked with a mystical light in her eyes. "We must visit all the places of historic interest before you settle down to work."

She had a long list of them. The Tower of London, St. James's Palace, the National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Cheshire Cheese, Carlyle's house in Chelsea, the Wallace Collection. . . .

John grinned at her good-humouredly

"Now, see," he said firmly. "I haven't come here as an American tourist. You can cut out all that as far as I'm concerned. I'm here as a reporter of social conditions and political affairs. Don't you drag me off to see mummies at the British Museum or waxworks at Madame Tussaud's. I'm going to be an observer of the human puppet-show in this quaint little island."

Judy put her hand on his for a moment and spoke emotionally.

"Look at that old church nestling among the trees. I dare say it's Norman or Early English. People were saying their prayers under its old roof in times of revolution and plague and foreign wars hundreds of years before America was discovered."

John preserved his national poise.

"Well, I'm not going to get fussed about it. American civilization needn't cringe before old timbers and ancient tombstones. We've taught these people something, haven't we? They haven't caught up with us even yet in plumbing and central heating. They're still hanging on to ancient traditions of mediaevalism, which hold them back from modern progress. Those cottages over there look very picturesque, but I dare say they're quite insanitary and unfit for human habitation."

"Don't spoil the picture!" cried Judy. "Shakespeare's songs are singing in my head:

"I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows."

John slept presently after eating an English tea with toast and buttered tea-cakes, and she felt disappointed that he should sleep on his first journey to London instead of looking at England all the way and drinking in its beauty. Presently her own eyes closed, but she was not sleeping. She was thinking of something that had happened to her last night. She hadn't told John. She wasn't going to tell him, because he would only make fun of it, and, of course, there was nothing in it really.

Robin Bramley had met her on B deck as she was hurrying to John's stateroom, where she had left him wrestling with his packing while she said good-bye to different friends.

"I've been searching the ship for you," he told her.

She had been in other people's staterooms and then in a corner of the smoking-lounge with two American ladies from Boston. He couldn't have looked very far, or thoroughly. She had wondered where he had gone to and felt sorry not to say good night to him.

"I was round about," she told him. "Do you want me for anything special?"

"To-morrow," he said, with an air of mock tragedy, "we shall be lost to each other in London crowds. While your steamer trunks are being examined by the customs, Betty and I will be whirled in a fast-ticking taxi towards our London slum. I want to make sure that I shall see you again some day."

"Oh, nice!" said Judy; "what shall we do about it?"

She had answered lightly, but was really touched by his wish to see her again, if he really meant it and wasn't just kidding. He must know a lot of people in London. It seemed unlikely to her that he should want to resume friendly relations with women like herself who had just happened to sit at his table on an ocean trip and played a few deck games with him.

"What I'm going to do about it," he said, "is to hand you this little card upon which is inscribed my name and address. It's known to all the taxi-drivers in London because it's at the end of a mews in which they live with their squalling brats.

"I shall be dejected if you don't call round some day. Betty and I live in squalor, but we've high thoughts and noble ideals."

She thanked him for the address but refused the suggestion that they should take a turn on the upper deck.

"I must look after John," she told him. "He gets tangled up with his shirts and socks."

She held out her hand to him and said: "Thanks a thousand times for looking after a plain Judy."

He held her hand for a moment longer than was usual.

"I like plain Judys," he said. "They're so rare nowadays, and so refreshing. Well, good night, and good luck."

For a moment their eyes had met, and she saw in his a kind of whimsical comradeship. That is how it seemed to her. It was not sentimental, but comradely. He was not in the least sentimental, or anything of that kind. One day she would take her courage in both hands and find him out in his "slum", as he called it. It would be very nice to meet him again. So she thought in the train on the way to London.

"What are you smiling at?" asked John, waking from his slumber and watching her face.

"Secret thoughts," said Judy. "Not worth uttering aloud. I think we must be getting near London. Look at all the rows of little houses."

"Dolls' houses!" said John. "Why don't they save space by building them higher? A few skyscrapers here and there would brighten up the skyline. One family to one house, and each family refusing to know its neighbours because of social distinctions and caste differences; isn't that how it goes according to Arnold Bennett and Priestley, and other English authors?"

The train pulled into London. There was the usual scrimmage at journey's end, and John, looking very American with his low-crowned hat and square shoulders, stood gazing about him with smiling eyes. So this was his pitch! London! He didn't know a darned thing about it. He would have to

make many contacts before he could type off his first impressions.

A girl's voice spoke to him and brought him back to the immediate situation.

"Well, good-bye! Mind you report us favourably! We mean well."

It was Lady Anne Ede.

He raised his hat and shook hands with her.

"Good-bye, Lady Anne. I guess we shan't play any more games of deck tennis. But it's a great memory."

She flashed a smile at him at this reminder of her defeat and then rushed towards a tall, broad-shouldered man with a cry of "Hullo, Father!"

"I'll never see that girl again," thought John, and he felt sorry about it for a moment. She was certainly a beauty. He couldn't deny that. She had a fine style down to her finger-tips. He had noticed her hands, beautifully shaped, and there was something about her poise and movement which seemed to belong to her caste. There was something vital about her, and she had a frankness that was startling and amusing now and then, although most of her ideas were wrong. A reactionary young woman, with leanings towards Fascism and a contempt for democracy. She had asked Judy to go and see her, but that was probably a polite insincerity.

"Do you think we shall ever see that girl again?" he asked Judy, as they stood in front of a counter where customs officials were examining heavy luggage.

Judy was unable to answer the question, being thrust on one side by a heavy man who was excited about his trunks.

In the taxi-cab on the way to a hotel in the Buckingham Palace Road John lit a Camel cigarette and looked out at London.

"That must be Buckingham Palace," he said presently. "It looks uncannily like the pictures on the postal cards. See those sentries marching up and down? They're like the soldiers I used to play with as a boy when I had the mumps one time. I

wonder how long it will be before they're throwing hand-grenades at Germans."

"Oh, John!" said Judy. "Don't say such gruesome things!"

John's imagination was working at a great rate. He wondered something else.

"Do you think there will be an American Queen in that box of bricks one day? It's an amusing thought, isn't it? All the ladies of Long Island would come rushing over to be presented at Court."

"The English on the *Queen Mary* were worried about it," said Judy.

John fumbled in his pocket as the car slowed down outside the hotel.

"I'll have to get the hang of this English money," he said. "What's the difference between half a crown and a florin? Well, I guess we've arrived."

Two more Americans had arrived in London, which went on with its own life regardless of them.

IX

FRANKLIN SPEED, chief of the London office of the *New York Observer* in Fleet Street, received John Jennings Barton, Jr., with kindness and consideration. He was a New Englander with a nanny-goat beard, more neatly trimmed than that of Uncle Sam in the cartoons, and with a dry manner which was softened by an old-fashioned courtesy.

"Mr. Barton, I'm glad to see you on this side," he said, rising from his chair in a room which overlooked the highway of London's newspaper world, called by one of its writers "The Street of Adventure". "Mr. Lansing has written me about you, and there's no need for me to tell you that I'm familiar with your work. Mrs. Speed and I have always read it with pleasure, and it has helped us keep in touch with the mind and manners of the United States from this land of exile. You'll forgive me if I say that sometimes we've been a bit dejected by your interpretation of the American mind, to say nothing of its manners. Take a seat. Make yourself at home. I hope you had a good trip in the *Queen Mary*."

"Excellent," said John. "I and Judy—that's my sister—put in a good time. Now I'm keen to start work."

Mr. Franklin Speed smiled at this enthusiasm for work.

"No need for hurry," he answered. "There'll be lots to do later on when you've found your feet a bit. Take a look round. Mrs. Speed and I look forward to you and Miss Barton dining with us if you'll give us that pleasure one evening."

John accepted the invitation gladly. He understood that

Mr. Franklin Speed inhabited an old house in Chelsea, which surprised him somewhat, as from certain English novels he had read Chelsea, London, was the haunt of disreputable artists and red-headed ladies addicted to dope. He could not imagine this dry old New Englander being located in such a quarter.

"I want you to put me wise about things in England, Mr. Speed," he suggested later in the conversation. "I arrive with the innocence of the new-born babe, apart from following the news as it reaches New York. Looking at it from that angle I should say England is in pretty poor shape and suffering from a bad attack of the jitters owing to the menace of the dictatorships and a fumbling foreign policy."

Mr. Franklin's thin lips twisted to a dry smile.

"I've been here too long to dogmatize," he answered. "I thought I knew something about England when I had been here eight months. Now that I've been here eight years I'm beginning to have doubts."

John laughed at this scepticism.

"That's a depressing thought for a newcomer," he said. "Aren't there any well-defined trends?"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Franklin Speed. "The English mind, as far as I know it, doesn't move along defined tracks. It's hard to analyse English public opinion at any given moment. It's always reshaping itself according to events and pressures."

"What about tradition?" asked John. "Aren't these folk rooted in old traditions—as it was in the beginning, now, and ever shall be?"

Mr. Franklin Speed smiled dryly.

"I wouldn't deny the strength of tradition in this country," he agreed. "It's very strong, certainly. It has great reserves of strength which can be called up in times of crisis. But these people, as far as I know them, don't formulate any rigid policy or follow the lines of logic. They deal with events day by day. They adapt themselves unconsciously, and without intellectual effort or awareness, to the situation confronting them."

"They seem to have adapted themselves very successfully to loss of face lately," suggested John.

"How so?" asked Mr. Speed.

John had a few things to say about the climb-down to Mussolini in the Abyssinian War and the betrayal of Haile Selassie to Italian bandits. He also suggested that the British Government was in a state of jitters over Hitler's Germany, and was now capitulating to the dictatorships in Central Europe. Hadn't they let down the League pretty badly, and all hopes of collective security against aggressor nations?

"That's how we read it in the United States," he remarked.

Franklin Speed took the band off a new cigar and lit it slowly.

"That, I should say," he answered, "is the general interpretation sent over the wires by American correspondents in London. Your predecessor took that line very strongly, of course, and I don't say it runs counter to my own political convictions and instincts. But maybe it's an oversimplification. The American mind sees things clear-cut, in blacks and whites. Over here in Europe everything is a little blurred and there are many different shades of grey. You'll be making a mistake, I think, if you take the view that England is having an attack of the jitters. Talk a bit to the ordinary folk. You'll find them steady. They're not worrying except about the Test Match with Australia. Some of the intellectuals are anxious, that's true. Some of them are getting nervy, maybe. Well, it's not natural to be without a sense of apprehension when one's living on a thin crust over a smoking volcano. That's Europe. England believed that peace was established in 1918. It was over-optimistic. She led the way in disarmament. Now she's playing for time. I hear from fairly reliable sources that the British Government is elaborating a programme for rearmament on a big scale which will take the world by surprise. There are going to be other surprises later on. You're in time for them."

"What about Wallie Simpson?" asked John. "It's the one

topic of the New York gossipmongers. It's on the front page in all our newspapers."

Mr. Franklin Speed blinked behind his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Mrs. Speed and I," he said, "don't discuss that subject with English friends. It's best not. The English Press keeps it out."

"That seems to me wrong," said John. "You can't censor facts; they have a habit of breaking through."

Mr. Speed puffed out a long wreath of cigar smoke.

"I'm waiting till they break," he said. "Now how about next Thursday evening for that little dinner? Mrs. Speed generally insists on a black tie. Will you convey our best regards to Miss Barton, whom we look forward very much to knowing?"

He reiterated his advice that John should take a look round and make some contacts in London before committing himself to his first despatch.

"You'll find London will grow on you," he said. "It will be a wrench when I come to leave it. But there's another England outside London—in Canterbury and the cathedral towns, and the industrial cities, and the depressed areas, and the small villages away from the by-pass roads, which are doing much to spoil England's ancient peace and beauty. You'll have time for all that."

X

JOHN made an early visit to a contemporary of his at Harvard who had been in England for two years and therefore might think he knew more about it than Mr. Speed, who had been there for eight. It was Bryan Feversham, the brother of Diana, whom he found in a room of the American Embassy, deep in a leather arm-chair, reading page 750 of a novel entitled *Antony Adverse*. At the sight of each other these friends laughed, gripped hands, clapped each other on the back and laughed again.

"Well, now," said Bryan Feversham, "if it isn't Johnny Barton! Well, now, if it isn't my old college chum and comrade of my innocent youth."

John stepped back from him to get a good viewpoint, and laughed again with great enjoyment.

"Two years in England have done their worst for you, old son!" he said. "You look like the picture of a degenerate English aristocrat advertising the ten-dollars tailor. Why do you wear those pants in office hours? What's the meaning of that fancy vest? Are you going to be married this morning?"

Bryan Feversham was very good-looking in a well-cut English suit—Savile Row or Cork Street—with a morning coat and low-cut waistcoat and striped trousers pressed to a knife-edge. He regarded his friend with humorous horror.

"My dear Johnny," he exclaimed, "for the love of Mike let me implore you to go to a decent English tailor. If you call round at the British Foreign Office in that American outfit you won't get further than the waiting-room. But I'll admit that

I'm a bit formal to-day, having to attend a luncheon in the interests of diplomacy."

"No, you aren't," said John firmly. "If I know anything about it you're lunching with me and Judy. I have a thousand messages for you from Diana and your honoured parents."

"Now isn't that too bad!" exclaimed young Feversham. "I'd be tickled to death to lunch with you and Judy. Why, I haven't seen Judy for two years, which seem like two thousand. But the American Diplomatic Service is very austere in its demands upon its junior members. If I don't attend the lunch to-day there may be a crisis to-morrow between England and the United States. Believe me!"

"Be your age, kid," said John. "Judy is lunching at Harrods and I've promised to bring you along, dead or alive. I don't suppose England wants to pay the war debt in the next twenty-four hours. Take a chance on it."

Bryan Feversham wrestled with thought for a moment.

"Now, there's some truth in that," he admitted. "But I'll have to do some telephoning."

John noticed that the telephone number of the European crisis was on the Mayfair exchange and that Feversham spoke in a voice suitable for a lady friend.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, but will you excuse me from coming to that charming lunch to-day? The fact is I'm up to the neck in world affairs. So sorry! A thousand apologies. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

John listened to this performance with amusement and admiration.

"You certainly have learnt the English accent," he said. "I'll have to take lessons."

Feversham dropped his English accent as easily as he had put it on.

"If it isn't bully to see you again! How's everybody in Massachusetts? Tell me about the girls I used to love. How's linoleum? Have you met any of the bunch from Harvard lately? What do you know?"

After some preliminary conversation on these topics of home interest young Feversham had a sudden inspiration not unimportant to the career of an American newspaper man.

"I'd better introduce you to the Old Man. We'll just catch him before he goes to lunch at the French Embassy. He's had a letter about you from Mr. Lansing. Excuse me one second, Johnny, I'll see if he's free."

The American Ambassador to the Court of St. James's received John cordially and gave him five minutes before going out to his car.

"Mr. Barton," he said, rising from his chair in a handsome room with big windows overlooking Hyde Park, "I'm glad to meet you. Mr. Lansing, for whom I have a high respect, wrote me about you by last mail. I've read some of your writings and like them well. You'll be welcomed, I'm sure, by the American correspondents in London. Needless to say, they keep in close touch with us here and give us a fair amount of trouble sometimes—which we don't resent. No, sir! It's their job, and we try to be as helpful as we can with necessary discretion. They don't often let us down."

"I should be greatly favoured by the opportunity of discussing a few points with you, Mr. Ambassador," said John politely. "At the moment I'm taking a look round and gathering general information."

The American Ambassador, who was a heavily built man with a powerful, clean-shaven face, smiled at him through a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

"Take your time," he said. "One can't rush things in this country. It has a slower tempo than ours. I'm getting to know."

John put a leading question to draw him out.

"I take it that the international situation, sir, is not on the up-grade as far as this country is concerned."

The American Ambassador had a film over his eyes for a moment.

"Well, that's a big question, Mr. Barton. It raises many

points of interest and controversy. But I will say that I see the difficulties of this country with considerable sympathy. They're working for peace and not for war. Opinions differ as to the methods by which that policy may be best pursued. Some of our correspondents are highly critical of England's so-called surrender to Mussolini and the Fascist Powers. They work themselves up into moral indignation because the British Government refuse to take sides in the struggle between conflicting ideologies and fail to give a lead to democracies against dictatorships. But we have to acknowledge that the United States is equally anxious to keep out of any world war, and is pursuing a policy of neutrality and isolation."

John refrained from entering into an argument on this subject at that moment. In his secret thoughts he disagreed with the Ambassador, being convinced that the democracies of Europe would have to line up for mutual defence or go down before the advance of Fascism in its different manifestations. It was a conviction which he shared with intelligent friends in Greenwich Village and other places of free speech and large discussion. He was not prepared to change his views because of this old gentleman with a film over his eyes.

"Anyhow, it's an interesting world," he remarked cheerfully. "I wouldn't say it's dull."

He heard the Ambassador give a faint sigh.

"It's a world on the move to new camps," he said gravely. "One can't see far into the immediate future. There are many dark forces stirring in this time of transition—forces of evil against forces of good. You'll see more of the results than I shall, being a younger man. Well, Mr. Barton, I wish you all success in Fleet Street. It's a great opportunity for a thoughtful observer like yourself. History is made rapidly nowadays, and you'll be one of its chroniclers. That's a fine vocation. We want good interpreters between England and the United States."

He spoke a few words about his admiration for Mr.

Lansing, that great old newspaper man. Then he held out his hand to John again.

"Mr. Barton, I'll be seeing you again some time, no doubt."

John rejoined his friend Feversham, who was waiting for him in the ante-room.

"He's a nice old boy," said Feversham, with reference to the Ambassador. "Where did you say you were lunching, John? There's a nice little place in Jermyn Street."

But Judy was waiting for them in the restaurant of Harrods, where young Feversham greeted her with enthusiasm.

"Why, Judy Barton! You're looking fine. And it's two years since I took you to that show in Boston, with Diana, just before I sailed to this country. How's life? How's Ted Dickson and all the bunch? Aren't they marrying in Massachusetts? What's wrong with the boys?"

"They're economizing," Judy told him. "Most of them are hanging around and waiting for better times. But some of them take a chance. Joan Harley has two babies."

"You don't say!" exclaimed young Feversham. "And to think that I might have been their father if I hadn't been sent to little old England. Well, well, well!"

Judy watched him as he looked round the restaurant to see if he knew anybody. He did. A pretty English girl sitting with an elderly lady smiled at him and waggled two fingers.

"That's Lady Virginia Whittinghame," he said. "I dined with her last night at Claridges. A very sophisticated young woman."

Bryan Feversham, thought Judy, had changed a good deal. He looked different in English clothes. She had known him better when he and John had been at Harvard together and come home in college suits, which they had flung off for tennis shirts and shorts. She remembered a time when he had been sentimental with her. He had wanted to kiss her one evening down by his father's swimming-pool and she had thrust him off with both hands. Then he had been sentimental about Joan,

who was then Joan Chamberlain and now the mother of two babies. He looked elegant, she thought; almost too elegant to be quite American. His face was thinner and she detected a note of affectation in his voice and manner.

"It's not the old Bryan," she thought. "I don't think it's an improvement. But I dare say he thinks the same about me."

John was looking round the restaurant of the big stores. The English people who were lunching there interested him as types. They were quite cheerful in a subdued way. There would have been more noise in an American restaurant. Some of the girls were fairly smart, and showed good figures as they walked by to find their tables. Once or twice a mannequin passed with swaying hips, showing off frocks and disconcerting elderly Englishmen. At the table next to him was a family party—a mother and father with a tall son and two daughters. The tall son seemed to be in the British Navy. He was talking about the time he was stationed in the Mediterranean.

"The Italian aircraft," he said, "were very active. They liked to show themselves off. They can fly all right."

"Supposing it had come to a scrap?" asked the father, who looked like a stage version of a British admiral with very blue eyes and very square chin.

"Our Air Force is pretty thin," answered his son. "We should have been outclassed in the air. It wouldn't have been amusing really."

One of the girls spoke to him. She had the family face and eyes.

"It seems rotten if we have to be afraid of Italy—of all nations in the world, Dick."

The young man glanced at her with a smile.

"Who said we're afraid? But if our parlour Bolshies refuse to support the defence forces, we must pay the penalty of weakness."

He became aware of John's interest in this family conversation and suddenly dried up.

Young Feversham was talking about English social life.

As a junior diplomat, he said, it was his duty to get around a bit. He had made some very pleasant friends. He was kept busy with cocktail parties, dinners, dances, receptions, King's Levees, and all the rest of it. Quite amusing!

"You're having a great time," said Judy. "We can't compete with it in Massachusetts."

"One falls for the glamour of it," admitted young Feversham. "English life's very colourful and in the diplomatic world one meets interesting folk of all nationalities. It's like being one of the actors in an exciting drama."

"What's the next act going to be?" asked John.

Young Feversham glanced at him as though wondering how much he ought to tell.

"It's likely to be full of human interest," he answered. "There's a great part for a lady in it. I guess there'll be some melodramatic situations."

He glanced over his shoulder and looked warningly at his two friends.

"We're getting on to dangerous ground," he said. "Thin ice, likely to break at any moment."

"Tell me," said John, "where do I go to get a line on the English idea of things? I'd like to get in touch with the Labour crowd and the intellectuals of the Left. Don't they do most of the thinking over here?"

Bryan Feversham was amused by this inquiry.

"I'll say they do most of the talking!" he laughed. "They've a sentimental affection for Moscow and get up in the House of Commons accusing the Government of cowardice for not declaring war on the dictatorships—leaving out Russia—while refusing to support rearmament. They make me tired."

"Where do you get intellectual refreshment?" asked Judy.

Bryan Feversham saw the laugh in her eyes and answered it.

"Oh, I'm not one of the highbrows, Judy, believe me. I distrust 'em. I like pleasant people who have civilized manners and a touch of the old tradition. They don't call

themselves intellectuals, but some of them are pretty wise, I'll tell you. You'll find them in old gardens with a golf club in the neighbourhood. They're the people who pull the wires and do the big jobs, and don't say much about it. If I want to know what England's thinking I don't go to the Bloomsbury boys. I talk to fellows who help to run the British Empire and know Africa and India like their own back garden. Or I talk to their women, who combine charm with quite enough intelligence to get around and keep things sweet. That's England. You can't beat it."

He spoke for a few moments about some of his English friends. He had stayed the week-end at Lady Mapledrakes' in an old Elizabethan mansion with some priceless pictures and tapestries. Young Mapledrakes played a pretty good game of polo. Bryan was also friends with the Dickenhams—Lord and Lady Dickenham, whose photographs appeared in that week's *Tatler*. Phyllis, that was Lady Dickenham, was only twenty-six and looked like Romney's portrait of Lady Hamilton—the one with the muff. She was very lovely, he thought, and extremely intelligent. He couldn't say the same of her husband, who was not exactly one of the higher intelligences.

John listened with good-natured disapproval.

"The Feversham boy," he said to Judy, as though his friend had departed, "has become a pukka sahib. He talks like a scion of the old aristocracy. I observe that he has linked up with reaction and social caste, forgetting that his forefathers travelled steerage to New York for the sake of liberty and idealism."

Bryan Feversham took his jibe good-humouredly.

"The world," he said, "is becoming very dangerous because of all this darned idealism. I'm harking back to a belief in unexalted commonsense with a decent respect for class distinctions, just as strong in the United States as they are over here, but based on the dollar standard."

They had a slight argument on this subject, followed by conversation regarding Diana and family affairs, until

Feversham looked at his wrist-watch and reminded his friends that he had duties to perform which, if left undone, might be very serious to the world situation and his own career.

Before departing in a hurry of which John was utterly sceptical, he announced that he was giving a little party in his flat at Knightsbridge on the following Thursday evening and would be delighted if John and Judy would favour the company with their distinguished presence.

"Oh, nice!" said Judy. "We'll be there. Did you say Knightsbridge? Isn't there a slum in that neighbourhood?"

"It's close to the Park," he told her, "and only a stone's-throw from here. It's one of the smart residential districts."

He paid her a parting compliment.

"You're looking wonderful! It's a treat to see you again, Judy."

They watched him thread his way through the tables of the big restaurant on the top floor of Harrods. He stopped to speak to the girl who had waggled her fingers at him, and held her hand for a moment.

"A lost soul!" said John. "Gone English and all that! He'll hate coming back to the United States one day. So vulgar, aren't we? So uncivilized!"

"Now, John," said Judy reprovingly, "you're being unfair. It's natural to take the colour of one's surroundings, isn't it?"

"I'm an American," said John. "I hope to remain one. I don't believe in this caste stuff. All these English titles make me tired. What do they mean, anyhow, in a world that has no use for aristocracy, gone broke, and keeping up a pretence, like the Russian exiles in New York who become shopwalkers and salesmen, but still bow over the hands of Grand Duchesses, exploiting their titles—mostly fake, anyhow—to get customers for their fashion shops."

Judy put her hand on his arm when he had paid his bill and walked with her through the restaurant.

"Let's take a walk down Knightsbridge," she suggested. "We must learn to find our way about."

XI

THEY learnt to find their way about here and there, though there were unknown regions in which mysterious millions lived in the outer darkness beyond their immediate reach or knowledge. The names of those places were written on the buses which halted at Hyde Park Corner or other stopping-places, and some of them had an old-fashioned fragrance as though calling to green fields and fairy-haunted woods. Highgate, where, as Judy remembered, Dick Whittington had leant against a milestone with his faithful cat; Finsbury Park, Stoke Newington, Hampstead, Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Seven Sisters. It was a later discovery that these places were not all so alluring as their names suggested, and that the green fields and fairy-haunted woods had been replaced by innumerable streets of mean houses and cheap shops, crowded by a harassed community not attractive in the mass and unbeautiful.

Judy began to know London better than John, who took taxis everywhere unless restrained, and stayed some time every day at the office. She walked about till her feet ached. There was always something to see which thrilled her romantic mind. There were the little pageants of London such as that outside St. James's Palace at the Changing of the Guard, where she stood amidst a small crowd, in which she recognized fellow-Americans, while the band played and two officers of the Guards, looking very beautiful, paraded up and down, chatting to each other under their bearskins. She wondered what they were talking about. For one absurd moment she

wondered whether they were discussing the likelihood of Mrs. Simpson marrying King Edward.

One morning she saw the King himself riding down the Mall towards Buckingham Palace with his three brothers and a King's bodyguard of cavalry in silver breastplates—the Life Guards, of course, and just as magnificent as she remembered them on her first trip to England. She knew that it must be the King himself because of the cheers by lines of English people, mostly women, on the sidewalk. But all she saw was a small section of a young-looking face hidden by an enormous bearskin and a strap under the lip. He raised his hand mechanically in salute and rode past at a trot.

Two women standing near to her exchanged information.

"The papers say he's going away for a cruise in the Mediterranean. That'll be nice for him."

"Yes, won't it? And the poor boy needs it, I'm sure. They don't give him much rest, do they? I call it a shame."

"Well, the Royal Family never shirks their duties, do they? Look at dear Queen Mary. She don't spare herself, and at her age, too!"

"Did you see the new hat the Duchess of Kent was wearing yesterday? Oh, very posh! Of course, I only saw the photographs in the *Daily Mirror*."

"Sweet, I call her. And the Duke looks such a nice boy, don't he?"

The papers announced that the King was going into the distressed areas again, and John approved.

"Edward Eight has the democratic idea," he said. "He won't allow those fellows in Parliament to forget the unemployed districts, for which they don't seem to be doing anything helpful, as far as I can make out. They hate to be reminded. That young man—not so young as he looks—has the people at the back of him, I should say, because he's on their side and doesn't seem to care a hoot about all this pageantry and stuff, which bores him stiff, I'm told."

Judy had an artist's eye and was not opposed to pageantry on principle.

"We could do with some of it in the United States," she remarked. "Don't you think we need more colour in our lives, John? Isn't it necessary for human nature? These people seem to get a lot of pleasure out of it. It's part of the drama of life, otherwise so drab."

John didn't agree. He thought the world would be safer for democracy if all uniforms were abolished, and if soldiers wore nothing but Sam Brown belts and badges with ordinary clothes.

He talked like that sometimes, but she noticed he was falling under the spell of London and was not insensitive to its historical appeal. He had been very silent and thoughtful in Westminster Abbey, and admitted afterwards that it had given him a thrill because of all the monuments to famous men, all the ghosts who haunted this old shrine. John had read history at Harvard. He was not nearly such a Philistine as sometimes he pretended, just to check her American sentiment.

He had been surprised to find that Chelsea was a respectable place, not entirely inhabited by poverty-stricken artists and red-haired ladies addicted to dope. The evening they had dined with the Franklin Speeds in Cheyne Row no artists were visible on the sidewalks, and they learnt from Mrs. Speed that many artists found Chelsea too expensive and had moved elsewhere, probably to Maida Vale, where rents were cheaper. In any case, she said, there was not much market for art, as most people lived in small flats where it was dangerous to drive a nail into any wall.

Mr. Speed's company at dinner had been very respectable, of course, and Judy was enchanted with his little home in Cheyne Row, not far from where Carlyle had lived with his adorable Jane. It was pure eighteenth century, with panelled walls and a powder closet, just as it had been lived in by little ladies in crinolines and gentlemen with powdered wigs. Perhaps they had played chamber music in these rooms. Judy

was aware of pleasant vibrations, and if there were any ghosts she thought they were nice ghosts.

The first guests to arrive were an American journalist and his wife, who complained of English food and English servants, and thought England was losing its reputation for honesty under the temptation of cheating American visitors.

Mrs. Speed, who was a bright little New England lady, disagreed with this view. English food hadn't poisoned her yet, she said. On the whole she thought it better than the canned food which provided the United States with much of its nourishment in small households. As for English servants, she had no complaints after the first hazardous adventures in housekeeping. She had two good souls—a man and his wife who looked after Franklin and herself with a fidelity which was quite touching.

An English doctor and his wife had come to dinner. The doctor had treated Mrs. Speed for bronchitis and had a cheery bedside manner and amusing anecdotes about unnamed patients, who mostly suffered from nervous disorders, he said, due to the strain of modern life and the inquisition of tax-collectors. His wife was one of those chattering women, to whom John took an instant dislike because she asked him if American film plays were at all like life in the United States. If so, she thought, she would rather live in Chelsea.

The other guests had been an English clergyman and his wife, who had come to Chelsea from an East End parish. John had had a great time with the clergyman after some scepticism of his sincerity due to his voice and accent. All his heart, it seemed, was in the East End among the dockers and labourers.

"Great-hearted fellows!" he had said. "If once you make friends with them, they'll do anything for you. They're God's own gentlemen when they keep off the drink, as most of them do nowadays. I wouldn't say as much for all their sons and daughters. Some of those little hussies get quite out of hand and have no more morality than stray cats. But what can you

expect with all the temptations at every street corner? The picture palace accounts for much of it—the lure of sex, false values, a dream world into which they go for escape from drabness and drudgery. I'm not blaming them. *Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner*. I blame the lowered standards of social life in all classes and the failure of religion to satisfy the young minds of this materialistic civilization."

"Do you find much Communism among them?" asked John. "Is England boiling up for a social revolution?"

That question had led to a great argument. The clergyman had taken the view that there was a certain amount of Communist propaganda going on, appealing especially to the younger people who went to night classes and political meetings.

"These young Communists," he said, "take themselves seriously, but they're up against instinctive and inherited loyalties far stronger still than any new-fangled 'ism'. You've only got to talk to the working folk, or the unemployed, to find that out! When King George drove through our mean streets during the Jubilee they all put out their little flags and cheered him on his way with wild enthusiasm."

"I just can't understand it," said John. "What good does kingship do to them? Isn't the crown just the symbol of caste and social distinction? Why should underfed folk go crazy when they see a member of the Royal Family, or the King himself, living on the fat of the land, with all his palaces and castles, and social privileges, paid for by the people?"

The clergyman answered good-humouredly with a smile on his thin, ascetic face.

"That's the American idea! But there's something mystical in English kingship—very hard to explain. There's all our history in it, all our struggles through plagues and wars, and famines, and victories and defeats. It's a family affair. The King, in a way, is the Father of his people. He's dedicated to their service. He may be a poor figure, but all the

same he's the Old Man, the Governor, and his kingship is the symbol of what England means to the people themselves. Our young King Edward has only got to lift his little finger and lead them anywhere he wants to go, even if it's towards perilous adventure. But then he has personality as well. He's the prince in their fairy-tale. They like his spirit and his sportsmanship."

"What do they think of Mrs. Simpson?" asked John.

"Who's that?" asked the clergyman, looking puzzled.

"John!" said Judy hurriedly. "Aren't you getting a little irrelevant?"

John had dropped a heavy brick and felt rather bad about it afterwards.

"It just slipped out!" he explained to Judy when they walked back on a summer night. "Franklin Speed gave me a look which made my coffee taste bitter."

He laughed uneasily at the reminiscence.

"That clergyman," he said, "impressed me a good deal. When once I got over his accent I saw a human soul looking through his eyes. I should say he's as near sainthood as any man can get in this wicked world. He was hit six times in the World War helping the wounded and carrying hot cocoa to water-logged trenches under shellfire. So Mr. Speed told me on the quiet. I take my hat off to him. But God save me from the woman he's made his wife!"

"She's all right," said Judy. "She means well. We had a nice talk about herbaceous borders and rock-gardens. Why do you dislike her?"

"I dislike her," said John firmly, "because she has the face of Queen Elizabeth, the manner of Queen Victoria, as described by Lytton Strachey, and the brain of a Massachusetts school-marm of the eighteen-eighties."

"That's unjust," said Judy, who was all for justice. "Would it surprise you to know that Mrs. Rye—Katherine Rye—is one of the best writers in England on wild flowers and English bird life? Mother has her books. It tore her heart

out to live in the East End without flowers and without birds for seven long years."

John was surprised to know.

"I'll forgive her," he said, as they walked back from Chelsea, going out of their way and losing themselves in a labyrinth of little streets between the Thames Embankment and the King's Road, in which they passed funny little houses, which Judy said were Queen Anne. It was a warm summer's night and the blinds had not been drawn over open windows in some of these houses, so that they could see inside the lighted rooms and had glimpses of the inhabitants. Some of the men were in dinner-jackets, some of the women had bare arms. One room was lit only by candles on a polished table at which sat a young man and woman. The young man, who had an actor's face, or, as Judy thought, a poet's face, took the girl's hand and raised it to his lips, and they heard her laugh. In one room someone was playing a piano with a light touch. It was one of Chopin's melodies.

"John," said Judy, "if we could get into these little houses we should meet some charming people, don't you think? The intellectuals and the thinkers—those who do pleasant things in life."

John was rather doubtful about that. He thought some of them might be pretty poisonous.

"The fact is, Judy," he said, "you're just wallowing in English romanticism. These English have nothing on us. We can show this kind of thing in Greenwich Village or Kansas City."

Judy explained her point of view.

"I'm not excited because they have anything on us, John. It's because they're just a little different from us. Aren't you interested in other people's lives? Don't you want to find your way into other people's minds?"

"At the moment," said John, "I want to find my way into King's Road or some spot where you and I can get a taxi-cab to Buckingham Palace Road."

"They call it Buckingham, not Bucking—ham," said Judy. "I've noticed it."

John ignored her remark and accosted a policeman who was passing down the street in rubber-soled shoes.

"How do we find a cab, Mr. Policeman?" he asked.

The policeman, who was a young man, laughed, put one finger in his belt, and answered in an Oxford accent:

"Well, it's a matter of chance at this time of night. Chelsea isn't seething with traffic. It's rather a backwater until the theatre folk come home. Ah, there's one! That's a bit of luck."

He stopped a taxi-cab and opened the door for Judy.

"Americans, aren't you?" he remarked.

"Well, how did you know that?" asked Judy.

The policeman laughed again.

"A certain accent and just that little difference."

John and Judy drove back to their hotel.

"Great guys, aren't they, these London policemen?" said John.

XII

As the weeks passed and summer was creeping into autumn John was away at the office most days or meeting people for professional purposes. He had made contact with other American journalists in London and with some members of the English Labour Party and other political and social groups. Judy met some of them in the evenings, when they got together at cocktail parties or went to small flats in big apartment houses very reminiscent of New York, though not so near the sky. These people were amusing and friendly, and rather odd. The younger women were inclined to smoke too much, generally through long cigarette-holders, and if they had drunk one cocktail too many, as sometimes they did, talked excitedly and laughed too much at their own remarks. The men stood around discussing abstract ideas or world affairs with great earnestness and gravity, except for an occasional humorist who tried to brighten things up by extravagant cynicism and the spirit of caricature. It was all very new to Judy, though she might have heard the same kind of talk in Greenwich Village, except for a difference of accent.

The younger women mostly earned their living in some way as magazine writers, fashion artists, advertising agents, florists, modistes and other occupations. She found some of them a little hard, a little self-assertive, a little lacking in charm. Yet, now and again, she was obliged to modify this secret verdict by meeting some woman in the thirties or forties with a sweetness and charm that appealed to Judy's heart and mind.

Sitting there with her bright eyes, feeling herself very American at first, she thought these women talked well but often in a nervous, high-strung manner which suggested that life was rather a strain to them. And some of them looked worn and fragile and without the vitality of American women or their vivacity at a party. They spoke sometimes with a kind of cynicism, as though utterly disillusioned, and with a scorn of all the old traditions and conventions which belonged to England. One of them, quite a young girl with short fair hair brushed like a boy's, shocked Judy by an Americanism which would not have been accepted in a Massachusetts drawing-room without protest.

"Man," she said, flicking the ash off a cigarette, "is a lousy animal."

"What is his latest form of lousiness?" asked a young man with a lock of dark hair falling over his forehead, which made him look like a poet, though actually he was the advertising manager of a film production company.

"Don't you read the papers?" asked the girl. "They're stuffed with horrors day by day. Mankind ought to be smudged off the earth."

"A considerable part of it," agreed the young man; "but I hope this well-deserved doom will spare South Kensington and the Finchley Road end of Maida Vale, where I have some very pleasant and harmless friends."

John found himself at ease in this company. He was beginning to get used to the tone of the English voice and talked earnestly and long with men who took the Left view in English politics and denounced Mr. Baldwin and all his Government as cowardly old women who trembled every time Hitler opened his mouth or Mussolini roared from the Palazzo Venezia. They were drastic in their opinions regarding social reform in England, and their hearts bled for the distressed areas, which most of them had never visited.

The Russian "experiment", they thought (and here John disagreed with them somewhat), had shown the way to the

new model of life for democracy. The Left in England, one of them said, would never make any real progress until they admitted the Communist Party on equal terms with Parliamentary Labour on the lines of the French *Front Populaire*—a remark strongly resented by a young Labour Member, who said that such a policy would cut the throat of the Labour movement owing to the opposition of the Trade Unions, who were deeply prejudiced against the hammer and sickle and the sign of the clenched fist.

"The real trouble," said another man at one of these parties in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, "is the encrusted sentiment and stupidity of the English people. What can you do for a people who shouted themselves hoarse when King George stood on his balcony at Buckingham Palace and who indulged in orgies of sickly emotion when his body lay in state in Westminster Abbey? It makes me despair."

John ignored the warning that Judy gave him that these opinions might not be the real voice of England.

"Perhaps it's just the opinion of small groups," she suggested. "If I were you, John, I wouldn't put too much stress on it in anything you write."

He answered her good-naturedly, but with brotherly arrogance.

"Don't you go telling me what I ought to write for the *Observer*, young woman! I'm listening. I'm getting hold of England from different slants. But I confess I feel sympathetic to this Left-minded crowd, who seem to have a fair share of intelligence and a forward-looking vision. They believe in democracy. They believe in standing up to the dictators—though it doesn't seem to have reached them that Russia is one of the dictatorships! Anyhow, they don't have that English reverence for caste and snobbishness which I find so irritating, though it appeals to the simple hearts of visiting Americans, to say nothing of our friend Bryan Feversham, who lies down before an English title."

Judy was pleased that John should be making such

interesting contacts, though they left her lonely now and then, especially in the daytime between ten and half past seven. She had a good deal of free time on her hands, though she had been busy for a while when they moved from the hotel in the Buckingham Palace Road to a furnished flat in Burton Court, overlooking old Chelsea Hospital, which Nell Gwynn had had built for old soldiers by Charles II, as Judy's books on London told her.

Every morning when she looked out of her window she could see the old soldiers of later wars sauntering out in scarlet coats and three-cornered hats, talking to the nursemaids who brought babies in perambulators to Chelsea Gardens. The flat had belonged to a friend of Mr. Speed, ordered back suddenly to New York for six months. He had left everything behind, including an elderly maid named Eliza Pockett, who spoke Cockney, and liked speaking it at great length, cooked badly, but was a demon at dusting and cleaning.

Judy went out each morning to do the shopping in King's Road, and every evening helped to prepare a dinner for the time when John came home, tired but chatty about his day's adventures.

There was a gap in the biggest part of the day which had to be filled. Judy filled it by visits to the National Gallery, the London Museum near St. James's Palace, the Wallace Collection, the Tate Gallery, the Tower of London, coachrides to Kew Gardens and Hampton Court, tea-table talks with Mrs. Speed, who was always pleased to see her, and long walks through old London squares, where, guide-book in hand, she gazed at houses once inhabited by famous Englishmen. Her explorations extended as far as the Caledonian Market, where she bought a small oil-painting which looked good and some brass candlesticks for John. She walked as far as the end of Charing Cross Road, where she spent two hours looking into old bookshops and examining secondhand books, until she found her hands black with grime.

From that expedition she brought back a first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* with the old drawings by Tenniel. It was all thrilling. It was all delightful. She loved being with John in this English adventure, though the days seemed rather long sometimes without him.

It was on one of those days when she was baffled for any immediate plan in quest of knowledge and interest that she walked from Burton Court, up Sloane Street, to Knightsbridge, which now she knew quite well. It was four o'clock on an afternoon which was getting near the Fall. A thin mist was creeping up from the river. Yellow leaves were fluttering down from the plane trees. She was glad of a fur jacket over her frock. She stopped in front of a policeman handling the traffic and, when there was a pause in the tide of motor-cars, made an enquiry of this public servant.

"Can you tell me where I can find Susan Street Mews?"

The policeman looked down at her with a good-humoured smile below his helmet.

"Why not?" he asked. "It's easy if you don't take the wrong turning."

"But I surely will," admitted Judy, "unless you're so very kind as to tell me the right one."

"Bless you, missy," said the policeman, "we're all kind-hearted when you gets to know us. See that messenger boy on a bicycle?"

Judy saw him.

"Well, that street he's going down is Susan Street Mews. Not difficult, is it?"

"I believe I'll find the way," said Judy, "thanks to your kindness."

"Now, don't go and lose yourself, missy," said the policeman, "because I've no time to come and find you."

He turned from her and dropped a white-sleeved arm and let loose the stream of traffic waiting for his signal.

Judy followed the line taken by the messenger boy on a bicycle and came into a narrow street with garages on each

side. Over the garages were window-boxes in which flowers were blooming, and little curtained windows, mostly open. From one of these windows came the voice of a soprano singing like a bird for the British Broadcasting Corporation. A young man, with braces hanging loose and a flannel shirt open at the neck, was washing down a car and held his hose in the gutter so that Judy could pass without wetting her shoes. She stopped to question him.

"Can you tell me where is Number Ten, Susan Street Mews?"

The young man was friendly and helpful.

"Through that open door and up the stairs. There's an artist lives there. Makes things bright in the mews. Comical eyebrows. Very amusing gent!"

He grinned as he resumed work with his hose, missing Judy's legs by half a yard deliberately with his jet of water.

"I wonder!" thought Judy, with some hesitation now that she had found Number Ten. "Well, Robin Bramley had given her his card. He had said something about being dejected if she didn't visit him. If he wasn't just kidding . . .

She went up a flight of wooden stairs and came to a landing and a door, on which was a brass knocker representing a ship in full sail. Underneath the knocker was a card on which she read his name :

MR. ROBERT BRAMLEY, R.I.

Judy stood for a moment uncertainly, and a little flush of colour swept her face. It was not often she had felt such shyness. On the doormat she noticed a bottle of milk. Perhaps he was away, anyhow.

"Well, he asked me to come," she said to herself, and then gave a little rat-tat with the ship in full sail.

She was answered instantly by an impatient voice :

"Put it down."

What did that mean? It was certainly a man's voice, and probably Mr. Bramley's. She thought she recognized it.

"Now what'll I do?" she asked herself.

After a moment she knocked again.

"Put it down!" shouted the impatient voice.

This was a bit tricky. What on earth did he want her to put down when she wanted to come in?

There was a brass contraption below the knocker. It was a letter-box. She lifted it open with her finger and called through it:

"Ars est celare artem!"

There was a moment's silence, and then she heard footsteps and the click of a lock. The door was opened and Robert Bramley stood there, in a painter's overall and holding a palette with half a dozen brushes sticking out of it. He raised his eyebrows, those comical eyebrows as they had been described by the young man with the hose, and then laughed.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I thought it was the lady with the milk, until I heard the secret password."

"Sorry!" said Judy. "But you asked me to call, you know."

"Rather! I've been waiting for you until I thought you were a faithless woman. Never again, I thought, shall I see Miss Judy Barton of Moorfield, Massachusetts, who has a laugh in her eyes when I make my simple jests. Come in and let's laugh again."

"Are you still jesting?" she asked with that laugh in her eyes.

"I go on grimly," he said. "What else can one do in a world which is no good place for nice people like you and me? But let me introduce you to the Duchess of Knightsbridge. Sarah, old dear, this is Miss Judith Barton of Massachusetts in the United States of America. Make a face like a lady."

He had led Judy into a long low room with a north light above old beams, grey and insect-eaten. The room was barely furnished except for some Persian rugs on the floor and a sofa with a few chairs grouped round an old fireplace. At the far end was a model's throne and a big easel, with an

unfinished portrait of an old woman with a black hat perched jauntily on thin white hair, and an apron of coarse sacking over her black dress, below which was a pair of dilapidated boots and white socks. The original of the portrait sat in a wooden chair on the model's throne and nodded to Judy with a wink of her left eye.

"Good afternoon, dearie! 'E's a funny gentleman, ain't 'e. 'E always makes me laugh."

"Now then, Sarah, you can hop it," said Mr. Bramley, putting down his palette and taking off his overall. Here are your wages, and don't drink them all away before you get home, old dear. I expect you at ten o'clock to-morrow, and if you're late there'll be another murder in Susan Street Mews. The Duchess of Knightsbridge strangled to death by a mad artist."

The old woman gave a wheezy laugh and took off her apron and folded it up.

"Gor'blimey, Mr. Bramley, you don't half make me laugh! But all you artist gentlemen is the same. No fit company for a respectable woman."

She turned to Judy with a leer.

"Watch out for yourself, dearie. You can't trust these artists. They all want you to take your clothes off before you've been with 'em five minutes."

"Hop it," said Bramley. "You're a nasty-minded old witch, and I'm sorry I ever tried to paint your fatal beauty!"

Sarah, as he called her, looked at her portrait for a moment with another wheezy laugh.

"Strike me blind!" she cried in a shrill voice. "If I'm like that I'll give up all 'ope! And to think I was once called 'The Flower of Mayfair' and all the young men after me from the 'Running 'Orse' to the 'Green Man'!"

"I'll listen to further instalments of your sinful biography next time we meet, Duchess," said Bramley. "Now you go home and get a nice cup of tea, and don't spill it on the tablecloth, there's a good girl."

"So long, lovey!" said the old woman. "Ten o'clock to-morrer and no larks!"

She adjusted her black hat and nodded to Judy.

"Good afternoon, sweetie. Don't let 'im maul you abaht. 'Tain't worth it for the moment's pleasure. What I say is . . ."

Bramley led her firmly but gently by the arm and pushed her out of his front door. He returned with the bottle of milk which had been placed on the doormat.

"A nice old thing really," he said. "I've a great respect for her. She has seven children and twenty-two grandchildren, all doing well except one, who's doing a stretch at Portland for burglary with violence."

"Gosh!" said Judy. "It's good!"

She stood in front of the unfinished portrait.

It was a fine bit of work, strong and full of character. He had handled his blacks extraordinarily well. The modelling of the face was fine, she thought.

"Yes," he said, "it hasn't come too badly, has it? I'm rather pleased with it myself."

"It's just marvellous!" cried Judy, with shining eyes.

Robert Bramley glanced at her for a moment with his whimsical smile.

"That's what I like about you Americans," he said. "You're so encouraging. You're so superlative. If you like something, you say so without hedging. When you say 'Marvellous!' with an explosive enthusiasm I feel that my life has not been spent in vain, thereby deceiving myself. How about a cup o' tea?"

"I'd love it," said Judy. "Let me make it."

"Not on your life," he answered firmly. "I have a special technique. Potter about and look at things while I get busy with it. How do you like that girl's head? Amusing, isn't it? One of Betty's little sluts."

"How's Betty?" asked Judy. "Perhaps I ought to call her Miss Elizabeth Bramley."

"Betty's all right," said her brother, putting a kettle on the open fire, which he kicked to give it more life. "I don't see much of her. After her day's work she flits off with one of her boy friends or with a bunch of her contemporaries and comes back with an escort in the small hours, waking up the whole damned mews with her girlish laughter, rising to shrieks of merriment for no reason at all. She's very modern. What do you think of this slum of ours?"

"I think it's wonderful," said Judy. "Enchanting. I love those old beams, and those open fireplaces."

She thought it more wonderful when he showed her other rooms beyond the studio. One was a very large room furnished like a drawing-room except for rows of bookshelves stacked untidily with books. In one corner was an open piano on which lay several sheets of music. On the white-washed walls between the beams there were some eighteenth-century miniatures in little tarnished frames. Against one of the walls was a Sheraton table with a lovely patina of age, and above the mantelshelf of an open fireplace like that in the studio was a portrait of Betty in an evening frock, with bare shoulders, looking like a maid of honour at Queen Victoria's court, and very demure. Judy's quick eyes noticed everything, even some little Japanese ivories on a corner cupboard. She was given a peep of Betty's bedroom, which was very dainty. Judy was entranced.

"Do you call this a slum?" she asked. "I call it a fairy tale. I didn't guess there were such places in London."

"Good heavens, yes!" said Bramley. "You'll see hundreds of them if you know where to find 'em. They're inhabited by the refugees of a lost world who pretend that a rat-infested attic is more amusing than a smart flat with every modern convenience."

"What do you mean by the refugees of a lost world?" asked Judy, following him back to the studio, where the kettle was boiling on the coal fire.

He attended to the kettle for a moment before he answered.

"The victims of a World War. Somebody had to pay for that orgy of blood. Hence income tax and death duties which dragged down our honoured parents and forced us into this squalor with a few relics of our ancient caste."

His eyes roved for a moment to the miniatures in their tarnished frames.

"It's all very good for us," he admitted. "Some of us have learned to earn an honest livelihood. Alas! I'm not one of them. I'm a kept man. Betty keeps me out of her manicure shop. Silly of her, isn't it?"

Judy didn't believe that statement, especially as it was said with a secret smile as he poured hot water into a pleasant-looking teapot of Georgian silver.

"Don't you sell things?" she answered in her frank American way. "I'm terribly impressed by your work."

Robert Bramley poured her out a cup of tea and handed her the sugar and milk.

"Sell things?" he enquired. "Great God, no!"

"Why not?" asked Judy.

"Why should anyone want to cover up their walls with hideous representations of ugly people? Who, for instance, would care to hang up old Sarah over his dining-room mantel-piece? I've had a lot of fun painting her but I don't expect anybody to live with the lady and to pay for the privilege. That would be silly!"

"That's very discouraging," said Judy. "In America public bodies still give our artists a chance of showing any genius they may have. They provide large wall space in State buildings for any Michael Angelo who may be lurking in Pittsburgh or Philadelphia or Greenwich Village. The results so far are not encouraging, but the opportunity is there."

Robert Bramley was interested to hear this. It opened up a new vista to him.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if they would let me splosh about on three hundred yards of wall space, with large-sized brushes? I'd let myself go on allegory. It's my

strong suit. I might do them 'The Blessings of Civilization' . . . a crowd outside Woolworths—typical of mass-produced humanity; a happy family listening to the radio with a view beyond of a jazz band with many saxophones of enormous size and beauty; a munition factory with sturdy men stripped to the waist producing lovely-looking bombs of highly polished steel fifteen feet high and stuffed with high explosives. I might work in 'The Conquest of the Air', with squadrons of aeroplanes above the ruins of crowded cities in which multitudes have perished in every contortion of human agony. My fresco would include 'The Gift of Science to Humanity', with bespectacled professors in vast laboratories devising new forms of poison gas. There should be a panel devoted to 'The Beauty of Childhood', depicting hordes of lovely little ones all in their pretty gas masks. 'The Triumph of Youth' would be represented by battalions of marching boys in a long perspective, reaching vanishing-point, on their way to the old battlefields, past the old cemeteries of dead heroes. What endless possibilities for soaring imagination and pleasant sentiment! It might be called by the simple name of 'Progress'."

"Is that how you see things?" asked Judy.

He saw things like that when he looked farther than the chimney-pots etched against a grey sky outside his windows. But more often he turned away from that distant view to enjoy the amusement of life in a London mews, where there was an illusion of security and the anodyne of unremitting toil.

"Art," he said, "is just dope. It's an escape into dream-land. Whereas some people go to the movies to get away from drab reality, I paint the Duchess of Knightsbridge in all her glory, or get one of Betty's young women to sit for me. That kid has a good head, hasn't she? I amused myself quite a lot trying to get the look in her eyes—that don't-care-a-damn look."

"I think you've done it," said Judy. "It's alive!"

Bramley laughed at this verdict, which he considered too favourable.

"Oh, I can't paint!" he said carelessly. "But I keep on trying. That's the fun of it."

He stood back from her for a moment and looked at her with his head slightly on one side.

"I'd like to have a stab at you one day," he said. "You have a good head, you know. I thought so in the *Queen Mary*. There's all America in your eyes. The pioneer woman, slightly modified by Smith's College."

Judy burst out laughing at this absurdity.

"I'm a plain Judy," she answered presently.

Bramley did not agree with her and begged to differ.

"You're not one of those doll-faced damsels who grin above advertisements of toothpaste or ladies' knickers. But you'd be very amusing to paint. I like your nostrils, and that little twist to your lips when you laugh. And your head has a good poise."

"I find that distinctly encouraging," said Judy with mock gravity. "But all the time I'm thinking that your own head is rather interesting."

"Mine?" exclaimed Bramley with astonishment. "Why, I look like an ostler when he's drunk too much beer. It comes from a long line of horsey ancestors."

"If I had my things here," said Judy, "I'd like to do a half-length of you. I'd just call it 'Portrait of an English Gentleman'. Boston would go crazy about it and I should sell it to the Metropolitan Art Gallery for many dollars."

"Have a stab at it," said Bramley good-naturedly. "Having victimized so many other people, I don't see why I should escape martyrdom. I'd like to see how you handle it."

He offered her free use of his brushes, colours and canvas.

"It's an exciting idea!" said Judy. "Maybe one day . . ."

She was a little doubtful as to what John would say if

she spent her time in this studio with a strange Englishman. Of course she was greatly tempted. It would be wonderfully amusing to have a "stab" at him, as he said. She liked the modelling of his face, rather powerful and yet with nothing coarse or hard about it, rather melancholy and yet very humorous. His dark, deep-set eyes would need some handling, and that difficult mouth would defeat her. Of course she would make a mess of it, but she would start off as usual with excitement and enthusiasm. His colour was very paintable. She would use a lot of burnt sienna in it with ivory white and a touch of cadmium. There was a bit of blue here and there. She wouldn't work it up too much. She would leave it fairly rough if she could get any strength into it.

"What's that canvas over there in a frame?" she asked. "May I look at it?"

There was a full-length canvas in an old gilt frame with its face to the wall.

"Oh, that's nothing," he answered carelessly. "Portrait of a lady. I made a muck of it."

She had an idea that he didn't want her to see it.

Presently there was a knock at the door—a lively tattoo with the ship in full sail.

"Damn!" said Bramley. "I was enjoying our talk. One of Betty's sluts, I expect. They always want to waste my time with their foolish chatter."

He seemed disinclined to open the door, but the knocker was insistent and playful.

"Ten thousand maledictions!" exclaimed Bramley, striding towards the door.

Judy heard him open it and speak to someone politely.

"Hullo! I thought you were at the old homestead."

"I came up to do some shopping," answered a girl's voice. "I thought I would pop in and get a cup of tea."

"Yes," said Bramley. "I know! You want to save three-pence at Lyons. You want to get something for nothing, with the usual depravity of modern woman. How's David?"

"Worried," said the girl. "He seems to have fallen for an Italian contessa, the wife of one of Mussolini's generals now in Abyssinia. Silly of him, isn't it?"

"Ridiculous," said Bramley. "He's young enough to know better."

They were talking in the passageway and then came into the studio. The girl was Lady Anne Ede, as Judy had known by her voice and her way of laughing.

"Hullo!" cried Lady Anne Ede. "How jolly to find you here! How's your good-looking brother who gave me such a whopping at deck tennis?"

She shook hands and looked with smiling eyes at Judy.

"It's nice to meet you again," said Judy. "John and I thought we had lost you for ever and ever."

Lady Anne Ede looked slightly conscience-stricken.

"I've been so fussed lately. Father hasn't been too well, and David dragged me off to Paris before he went back to Rome. Won't you and your brother come down and spend a week-end with us? We could show you some good English scenery and not bore you too much."

"I'm sure John and I would enjoy it," said Judy. "It would be good for John to see an English country house."

That point of view seemed new to Anne Ede.

"Oh, well, it's rather old and mouldy! But we're quite fond of it. Robin, darling, couldn't you bring down Betty at the same time? What about the week-end after next?"

Robin accepted grudgingly.

"I might if you don't expect me to play tennis or indulge in rude country sports. I'll put it up to Betty."

That evening when John came home from the office Judy had exciting things to tell him, but it was not without difficulty she persuaded him to accept the invitation for the week-end after next.

"I find that girl Lady Anne somewhat alarming," he said doubtfully. "And I've no use for degenerate English

aristocrats, with their supercilious manners and drawling voices. What do they mean, anyhow, in a democratic country which can't afford to keep them?"

"I'd like to go, John," said Judy rather wistfully.

It was for Judy's sake that a good-natured brother yielded the point. After all, he wanted Judy to have a good time.

XIII

THERE was a car waiting for the American brother and sister at Horsham station when they arrived for the week-end visit to Aldermere, where Lady Anne and her family had their dwelling-place. It was a car familiar in aspect to John Barton, being a Ford of some antiquity with one of its mudguards in urgent need of repair.

"Are you wanting Aldermere?" asked a young man of rustic appearance, in spite of a chauffeur's cap and blue dust-coat.

Satisfied on this point, he dropped the fag-end of a cigarette into a puddle at his feet and opened the door for the travellers. It was a misfortune that the handle came off in his grip.

"Well, that's done it!" he said. "I'll have to tie it up with a bit of string. "Lady Marjorie went shopping yesterday in 'Orsham."

"That mudguard looks a bit dejected," remarked John.

The young man took a look at it.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "Lady Marjorie went shopping yesterday in 'Orsham. Well, if you'll get in . . ."

John decided to sit next to him in front while Judy sat behind with some parcels containing groceries and, by the look of one of them, a pair of top-boots. For a few minutes she watched the door being tied up with a bit of string, which was almost a bit of rope, produced from the young man's side pocket. After that operation they were driven into an old town with a narrow High Street, blocked half-way down

by several small cars, somewhat smarter in appearance than the one provided for the guests of Lady Anne Ede.

A policeman was having an altercation with a young woman of some good looks at the wheel of a Baby Austin.

"Now, what's the good of messing up the whole traffic like this?" he enquired. "I've noticed you before. No consideration for the Highway Code."

"My dear good man," exclaimed the young woman in a high, clear voice, "why blame it on to me when the whole cause of it was that road-hog in front? Tell him with my compliments that he ought to be horse-whipped, and if he doesn't look out I'll do it myself."

"Now Miss——" said the policeman.

"Is this Horsham?" asked John.

"'Orsham," said the driver. "It always needs a bit of care. Lady Anne took a bump just at this corner a week come Thursday. That's put the Vauxhall out of action. His Lordship was a bit vexed about it."

"John," said Judy from the seat behind, "do look at those old houses! They're just too wonderful!"

John looked at the old houses with timbered fronts and overhanging gables. He liked the look of them. This was a corner of old England, but with modernity thrusting in. He had noticed the red shop-front of Woolworth's store. He remembered that Lady Anne had mentioned it as one sign of the Americanization of England.

Beyond Horsham they drove down narrow roads which twisted through the countryside. They were bordered with trees whose foliage was beginning to show signs of autumn and their leaves were falling now. Crinkled gold lay on the footpaths. Now and then the car passed a big estate with long walls and lodge gates leading into parks with pleasant meadows and clumps of tall trees.

The young man at the wheel mentioned their owners.

"That's Sir Jasper Perkin's place. Makes jam, you know. . . . That's Musgrave White's estate. You know! Silk

stockings and ladies' underwear. . . . Through them gates with the unicorns is Lord Hollywood's place. Wood pulp for newspapers. They say he runs a villa on the Coast Dazoor."

Judy leaned forward in her seat.

"This is Sussex, John. I dare say the ancestors of those old oaks made ships for the Armada in Queen Elizabeth's days."

"That's nice to know," said John, looking back to laugh at her.

He put a few questions to the young fellow at the wheel.

"What kind of place is Aldermere?"

The young man didn't seem to think much of it.

"It could do with a bit of modernizing. Very old-fashioned. But His Lordship won't have no changes made, and can't afford it, anyhow. Too many taxes."

"Tell me about the family," said John presently. "Who exactly is His Lordship?"

The young man at the wheel took his eyes off the road for a moment to glance at this stranger who showed such ignorance of things which everybody knew.

"His Lordship is His Lordship," he answered. "The Earls of Stanfield have been here for donkeys' years, as far back as history goes, I wouldn't be surprised. His eldest son was killed in the war. The present Viscount used to be Mr. Frank. There's Lady Anne and Lady Marjorie. And there's Mr. David and Mr. Richard who's at Winchester. And of course there's Her Ladyship."

He grinned over the wheel and repeated his last words.

"And of course there's Her Ladyship. That's where we mind our P's and Q's. She doesn't miss much that's going on. If one of the parlourmaids stays out late with a boy in the village she wants to know the reason why. It's no use trying to dodge things with her. She spots it before one has time to make the right kind of face."

"So the eldest son is a viscount," said John, out for

information before meeting the family. "How is it that the others are Mr. David and Mr. Richard?"

"It's just like that," said the young driver. "The eldest son of an earl is a viscount, and always has been. The others don't count. Of course the girls are ladies. I mean real ladies, not like some of them 'Orsham girls."

"So you believe in caste?" asked John.

"Never 'eard of it," said the young man.

"Social distinctions. Titles and all that. I've come from America, where we don't have them."

The driver of the ancient Ford thought this out and expressed his view a mile farther down the road.

"Titles is titles, I suppose. One knows a gentleman whether he has one or not. His young Lordship talks to me man to man same as he would to his own brothers. His Lordship comes round and takes a drop of elderberry wine now and then with my father, who was his batman in the war. Each one in his place and all with a friendly feeling. It seems natural to me, but then I was born to it."

"Did you ever hear of Jack Cade?" asked John.

The young man at the wheel had never heard of him.

"He was a rebel," said John. "He wanted to make everyone equal and led a peasant revolt against the tyranny of the old Barons."

"Oh, one of them Reds!" said the driver. "I've no use for 'em. One of His Lordship's grooms was taken that way until someone gave him a thick ear for talking like that in the 'Green Dragon'."

"John!" cried Judy from the back seat. "Look at those iron gates. There are coats of arms on the stone pillars."

"This is Aldermere," said their driver, turning into the gates.

XIV

THERE was a long drive up to the house, which presently came into view. It was mostly of red brick, mellowed by age. A tight-growing creeper, turning red, covered some of the walls and framed the windows. The roof-line of Horsham slate was very irregular and of different altitudes, as though the house had grown up in a haphazard way, bits being added on as afterthoughts, according to the needs of succeeding generations, with clusters of high chimney-stacks. One wing looked older than all the rest, being built of post and plaster in the Elizabethan style, with lattice windows facing the lawns and the long vista of an avenue of oaks, very old and gnarled, beyond which was a stretch of water.

"It looks like a Christmas card without the snow," said John, getting his first view of Aldermere. "I call that an old-fashioned house."

"It's too lovely!" said Judy, looking thrilled.

"The old roofs want retiling," said the young driver. "Some of the timbers are going rotten, and one of the chimneys blew off in the gale last week. There's Lady Marjorie. It looks as if she had taken a toss."

A young girl of nineteen or twenty, in riding-kit, was walking up the avenue leading a limping horse. She had a smudge of mud down one side of her face and her white shirt was torn across the shoulder.

She came up to the car and spoke to its young driver.

"A bloody business!" she said cheerfully. "I had a spill down by the spinney. All those damn' rabbit-holes."

"It won't do Bess any good," said the young man, getting out of the car.

"No bones broken," said Lady Marjorie. "Take her round to the stables and tell Nicklin. . . . I'll come along in a few minutes. And don't make a song and dance about it, my lad. Father needn't know just yet."

"That's all right, my lady," said the young man. "But this will need a bit of explaining to Her Ladyship."

"It does look a bit of a ruin!" admitted Lady Marjorie, staring at the ancient Ford with some amusement. "But kindly do what I tell you, Ted, and don't keep jawing about it."

"It's Her Ladyship that'll do the jawing," said the young man, feeling the knees of the wounded horse.

Lady Marjorie became aware of the occupants of the car for the first time.

"Hullo," she said. "Are you Anne's American friends?"

"That's so," said John politely. "This is my sister, Judith."

"How do you do?" said the girl, shaking hands with Judy. "I'm Marjorie Ede. Sorry I'm in such a muck, but I took a toss a few minutes ago. I'll get somebody to look after your things."

An elderly manservant, looking like a stage butler, came down the steps in answer to a tug at a bell-rope by Lady Marjorie.

"Well, there you are," said that young lady. "Old Pinney will look after you. You'll find Anne somewhere in the neighbourhood of the lake. She's doing a bit of fishing. I must slope off to the stables. So long."

She raised one hand in salute and went off with a long boyish stride.

John and Judy were shown to their rooms by the elderly manservant. They were adjoining rooms down a long passage with many doors.

"Mind your head, sir," said old Pinney, as he had been called. "Rather a low beam."

"Holy snakes!" said John, striking the top of his head against the rather low beam before the warning reached him.

"These old places take getting used to," said the man, hiding a smile behind his hairy old hand. "Second nature to us, of course."

John's bedroom was small and barely furnished. He noticed with astonishment an article of furniture which he hadn't seen since boyhood—a wash-hand stand with a jug and basin. He also noticed a four-poster bed suitable for the death scene in *Othello*. After this cursory examination of an Early-English bedchamber he went into Judy's room next door and found her standing in a state of ecstasy. Her bedroom had plastered walls with heavy, roughly axed and oddly shaped beams. The bed was on a raised dais, while in a little archway was a window about a foot square looking out on to the fields and woods of Aldermere. On a dressing-table covered with flowered chintz were two tall brass candlesticks and an oval mirror which seemed to have gone dim. Fortunately an electric switch turned on a light below one of the beams.

"We're in the Middle Ages," said John. "I expect to meet Anne Boleyn at any moment. I shan't be surprised if the family ghosts start paying us a friendly call. But I doubt whether there's any plumbing in this ancient mansion."

"Isn't it adorable?" exclaimed Judy. "Look at that bedstead. It's in the Queen Anne style. And that old wardrobe dates from William and Mary."

"Probably fake," said John the sceptic. "But how are we going to find our way down and get in touch with the family? That girl Lady Marjorie was a pretty kid, but didn't seem to worry about us."

Nobody worried about them. But when they had gone down a winding staircase and found their way into a long low room with casement windows looking on to a smooth lawn they heard voices through a half-opened door.

"You needn't lie about it," said a woman's voice sternly. "If there's anything I hate it's lies, and I always know."

"Yes, my lady. I'm very sorry, my lady."

"You're only sorry because I've found you out," said the stern voice, not quite so sternly. "Well, don't do it again or out you go, my lass. And if I find you playing around with young Lavender when he ought to be weeding the garden I'll send him off with a flea in his ear. You understand?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Well, that's that, and now go and wipe your eyes, Jenny."

Through the door came a middle-aged lady with fair hair growing grey. She wore a coat and skirt of rough tweed and she was carrying gardening-gloves and a pair of shears, and came striding across the polished boards in big shoes.

At the sight of John and Judy she stopped and looked at them with friendly eyes.

"Hullo! Are you Anne's friends or Betty's?"

"Lady Anne has kindly asked us for the week-end," said Judy.

"Oh, well, you'll find her about somewhere, I expect. I'm Anne's mother, Lady Stanfield, you know."

"How do you do?" said Judy.

"American, aren't you?" asked Lady Stanfield, taking Judy's hand for a moment in a firm grip. "I must talk to you about that man Roosevelt. He seems to be making a mess of things, doesn't he?"

"Well——" said John.

The Countess of Stanfield was not prepared to listen to him just then. "I'll see you this evening," she said. "I have to get on with my toiling and moiling. I dare say you'll find Anne."

She went out of the room with a thump, thump of her big shoes.

John winked at Judy and lowered his voice before he spoke. "Bloody Mary," he remarked out of the depths of his historical knowledge. "A very feudal lady, i' faith."

They did not find Anne for some time. They wandered through the gardens, which had the disorderly look of early

autumn, with the first leaves falling and flowers going to seed, and herbaceous borders overgrown with flowering plants, mostly golden, except for the mauve of heliotrope and the russet of ragged dahlias, and the flame-tipped spears of red-hot poker, and the snow-white petals of Michaelmas daisies. The paths were unweeded and the yew hedges needed clipping. Some of the lawns had not been mown for some time, and everywhere there was a look of neglect for lack of labour. But there was no lack of beauty, because of the full-grown oaks down the long avenue with their foliage turning to crinkled gold. At the end of this vista a silver gleam of water reflected white clouds in a blue sky. Beyond was a distant view of fields enclosed by wild hedges.

"It seems to me," said John, "that we have been invited to a primæval solitude for birds and beasts. Probably Lady Anne forgot she had asked us down. In America we look after our guests when we ask them."

"They're leaving us to ourselves for a while. It's the English way, I believe," said Judy. "I find all this very lovely."

Down by the lake they met a tall, elderly man in shabby riding-breeches and gaiters and an old straw hat, which looked as if he had sat on it lately. He was walking towards them with a gun under his arm and a terrier at his heels."

"Morning," he said gruffly.

"Good morning," said John. "Do you know anything about the history of this quaint old house and park?"

The elderly man looked at them for a moment as though wondering who they might be, and then glanced back at the old house.

"It's had a pretty long history," he said, "but not of much account. It was just an old manor house at the time of Edward III. The Edes were knights and squires until two centuries later. There was a Sir John Ede who fought at Agincourt."

"That's going back some way!" remarked John. "As an American I find that interesting."

"This place is going to rack and ruin," remarked the man in the battered straw hat. "It's only the men who go into trade and industry who can keep a place like this as it ought to be kept. The older families are giving up. Income tax and death duties are too much for them."

"Why don't they keep up with the times and go into business and trade like the new men?" enquired John.

The tall shabby man, who looked like a gamekeeper, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"The Edes have never been good at business. Most of them have been soldiers or public servants. They've no head for arithmetic. They were never any good as traders. That's their misfortune."

"It seems to me," said John, "that England can't afford the luxury of an aristocracy living on ancient traditions and dwindling privileges. With the increase of population and the advance of democracy this kind of place is an anachronism, don't you think?"

The elderly man seemed to agree.

"There's something in that, no doubt. It's the age of mass production and jerry-building. England is becoming a garden city of small houses for small families, each with its own garage and back yard. I can't say I like it, but then I'm old-fashioned and feel more at home with a gun and a dog."

He touched his hat and seemed inclined to move on.

John fumbled in his pocket for something like half a crown to give this elderly rustic who looked in need of a new hat. But the man turned at the sound of a voice calling "Coo-ee!" Across the lake came a flat-bottomed boat punted by a tall girl with fair hair, who was Lady Anne Ede.

"Hullo!" she shouted, as she propelled the boat nearer. "Sorry I was out fishing. I lost count of time."

She sprang out of the boat as it nosed its way into some rushes and held out her hand to Judith, who was nearest to her.

"Hullo, Judy," she said. "You look as if the English climate suited you. May I call you Judy, by the way?"

"I wish you would," said Judy. "It sounds nice when you say it."

Lady Anne turned to the elderly man.

"I couldn't get a bite, Father," she said. "Do you know Judy Barton and her brother? They were nice to me in the *Queen Mary*."

John was glad that he hadn't slipped half a crown into the hand of the Earl of Stanfield.

XV

BEFORE lunch Robert Bramley and his sister Betty arrived. They had driven down from London in town clothes and immediately changed, Betty appearing in a short frock and bare legs, although the weather couldn't be called warm by any American.

"Aren't you showing too much leg?" asked Lady Stanfield, regarding her with good-humoured disapproval as she sat on the terrace steps smoking the inevitable cigarette.

"Oh, I don't think so," answered Betty. "They're rather nice legs, don't you think?"

"That's a reason for having a longer frock," said Lady Stanfield. "You might put the gardeners off their jobs. Besides, your uncle is a shy man."

"Don't mind me," said Lord Stanfield, who had taken off his gaiters and looked less like a gamekeeper in baggy knickerbockers and thick stockings. "I'm well past the dangerous age. Isn't lunch ready yet?"

The luncheon was a disorderly affair in a low-ceilinged room with panelled walls. Robert Bramley came in through the window with a terrier pup in his arm, greeted by tail-wagging from three other dogs of different breeds, who made themselves a nuisance at table.

"Don't feed the brutes, Dick!" cried Lady Stanfield to her husband, who had flung a piece of cold mutton to a young Alsatian standing with cocked ears. "How often have I asked you not to?"

"Sorry, my dear," said Lord Stanfield humbly.

Robert Bramley was half under the table playing a game with two puppies, who seemed delighted to see him, but he emerged and shook hands with Judy over his shoulder.

"Nice to see you here," he said. "Aldermere has great charm but no central heating. As an American you will freeze to death."

He gave a friendly nod to John and sat down by Lady Marjorie, who was still in riding-kit.

"Well, Snooks," he said, putting his arm round her shoulder for a moment, "how's life?"

"Putrid!" said Lady Marjorie. "It conspires against me. I'm bruised all over my body. And I've fallen in love with a hairdresser in Horsham."

"Well, that ought to sweeten your young life," said Robin. "Is he a nice hairdresser?"

"Italian," answered Lady Marjorie. "I wish he wouldn't eat garlic. But he's lovely to look at."

Two other guests arrived. One of them was a middle-aged man with a little white moustache—that very handsome Englishman whom John had noticed in the *Queen Mary*. The other was his pretty-looking wife.

"'Morning, Munstead," said Lord Stanfield. "I thought you were going to Palestine to shoot Arabs."

"Not in these trousers," said Lord Munstead. "They asked me to go, but I was shot at too often in the Great War to like that kind of job. Besides, I'm pro-Arab. This Government is getting us into a horrible mess over there, as in most other places just now. I agreed with your speech the other day."

"Nice of you to say so," said Lord Stanfield, rising slightly in his chair so as to give his cheek to the pretty lady, who touched it with her lips.

"Well, Vera, my dear," he said, "glad to be home again after your American trip?"

"Oh, I've almost forgotten that," she answered. "I'm

sunk in Sussex. Presently autumn will come and then winter. Dreadful thought, Uncle."

"You young women are so restless," said Lord Stanfield. "Always wanting a change of scene. It's the same with Anne. She's just come back from Paris. Now she wants to join David in Rome."

Lady Munstead greeted the family, kissing the two girls and then looking over to Robert Bramley.

"Hullo, Robin," she said.

"Hullo, Vera," he answered. "Happy and all that?"

"The world situation isn't too pleasant," she said evasively, with a little smile and a sudden flutter of eyelashes.

Judy was watching her. She thought her very beautiful. And a curious idea came to her, quite without reason, that that beautiful lady was in love with Robert Bramley. It was an idea so utterly absurd in its lack of evidence that she rebuked herself for letting her imagination play such a silly trick.

"I had another letter from David this morning," said Anne. "He's gone completely gaga over that little contessa in Rome. He says she has a Monna Lisa smile."

"Well, don't give him away, Anne!" cried her younger sister. "His private letters aren't meant for publication, I imagine."

"Base aspersion, my child," said Anne calmly. "David has written in the same style to Mother and Frank, and makes no secret of it. I shall have to go and rescue him."

"Where the devil is Frank?" asked Lord Stanfield. "He sloped off after breakfast."

"He's over at Little Hatching," said Lady Stanfield.

"Again!" asked Lady Anne, with great amusement.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Now then, girls," said their mother, "don't go suggesting any nonsense. Frank is helping the Vicar to run his Boy Scouts."

"Ah!" said Marjorie darkly. "But what about the Vicar's lovely daughter! How do you think she would go as

Viscountess Ede? I know that siren! She would make eyes at a Franciscan Friar."

"Snooks," said Robert Bramley, "you shock me! Play the game, woman. Live and let live."

Lord Stanfield spoke from the head of the table.

"I like that girl Lydia. She's a pretty creature, and I have a high respect for her father. If Frank has his eye on Lydia he shows more taste than I expected from him."

"And that's saying something!" said Bramley, with mock enthusiasm. "We all know that His Lordship has a very fine taste in wines and women. Is it not an inherited instinct of the Edes? Did not the first Lord Stanfield get into trouble with Charles II for giving the glad eye to Lady Castlemaine?"

Lord Stanfield laughed at him over his rice pudding.

"Bosh!" he said good-humouredly. "I've been a respectable married man for thirty years. Nobody can accuse me of being a Don Juan."

"Now then, Dick," said Lady Stanfield, "don't tempt me to utter indiscretions, and before your own children, who ought to reverence your grey hairs."

"Grey hairs be damned!" growled His Lordship. "A man is as young as he feels. I can't say I don't admire a pretty face when I see it."

John and Judy listened to this family back-chat. No one had paid them much attention. No one had talked to them, until suddenly Lady Anne turned to John, who was sitting on her right hand.

"We're a disorderly crowd," she said. "We always go on like this."

"Why not?" asked John. "It's all very homely, and I'm pleasantly surprised."

Lady Anne was surprised by his surprise.

"What did you expect? Pomposity?"

"Formality," he admitted. "I'm not really familiar with the manners of English titled folk. I thought I should have to do some bowing and scraping."

Lady Anne laughed at the confession, which seemed to amuse her a good deal.

"Forget our titles," she said. "We don't worry about them. You can call me Anne if you like."

"I should like to," said John.

Presently he questioned her on one or two points.

"Is your father in the House of Lords?"

"Naturally," she told him. "Does that worry you?"

"I'd like to hear him speak there one day," he explained.

Anne laughed again and lowered her voice when she answered him.

"You'd have a painful experience. Father is not a heaven-born orator. When he has to make a speech he's like a bear with a sore ear for days before and goes about mumbling to himself. He hums and haws a good deal."

"I suppose he's a Die-Hard Tory," said John.

"As it happens, Father is a Liberal," said Anne. "He's one of the last relics of that unfortunate party which once ruled this happy land. My grandfather was a friend of Mr. Gladstone, of whom you may have heard."

At Harvard John Barton had read quite a lot about Mr. Gladstone.

"I'm the Die-Hard of the family," said Anne. "If you want to meet a reactionary, that's me!"

John had observed signs of that during the trip in the *Queen Mary*.

"I believe in duty and discipline," said Anne Ede.

"For other people?" asked John politely.

She appreciated the humour of this remark, but made a protest.

"That's hitting below the belt. But I'm ready for a little self-discipline in moments of national crisis. What we want in this country is a touch of dictatorship to round up all the slackers who talk about their rights but never about their duties."

"I smell the spirit of Queen Elizabeth," said John.

She took that as a compliment.

"Well, she was a sturdy old slut! England did well under her. It was our golden age, wasn't it?"

"As far as I can remember in the history books," said John, "there wasn't much liberty under the Tudors."

Anne was scornful of that word liberty.

"How it has been abused by all the little intellectuals of the Left and all the parlour Bolshies! A precious lot of liberty we should have if they came into power! Their dear friends in Russia have shown what we may expect if that happens. Slave labour in the timber camps, a shot in the back of the head for anyone who disagrees with Father Stalin."

"Anne, darling!" cried Betty from her side of the table. "Do I meet you on the tennis court this afternoon, or are you going to lie around looking beautiful? Marjorie and I issue a challenge to all and sundry."

The challenge was accepted. John was Anne's partner for three sets. He surprised himself by his own brilliance, not having handled a racket much since Harvard days.

"We're invincible," said Anne, when they beat the two girls at six-three, six-one, six-love. "I like having you as my partner, Mr. American."

A few other guests drifted in. They looked like the English passengers in the *Queen Mary* with a change of costume into country clothes—retired military men who barked at each other with odd noises of an explosive kind, and their middle-aged wives who chattered in high English tones, as though everyone were a little deaf, and two or three young men, moderately attractive and very self-assured. A tall young man in a plus-four suit of russet brown which looked well with his dark hair and tanned face appeared about tea-time, and said, "Hullo, everybody!"

Anne greeted him derisively.

"Return of the Prodigal Son! Had a good time at Little Hatching?"

"Not too bad," he answered calmly. "The Vicar and I have been putting in some good work."

Anne laughed again at this statement.

"How's the Vicar's lovely daughter? Still kittenish?"

"She wants you to go to tea with her one day," said the young man.

"Nothing doing!" cried Anne. "She and I have never hit it off since she made eyes at a nice Winchester boy whose name I forget for the moment, though I loved him dearly at the time."

She turned to John, who was standing by her side.

"This is my brother Frank. He runs a garage in Mayfair—not successfully, alas! If you want a secondhand Rolls-Royce you can get one at a bargain. Frank, this is John Barton. He's an American, and very sensitive, so take care what you say about your American clients who go off without paying their bills."

Viscount Ede nodded to John with a faint smile.

"Don't you mind Anne," he said. "She's always pulling somebody's leg."

Judy had disappeared from the scene for an hour or more. She came back with Robert Bramley, and had mud on her shoes and a flush of colour in her cheeks.

"We went for a walk in the woods," she told John. "I expected to meet Rosalind and the Melancholy Jacques."

"Instead of which," said Bramley, "we met a party of hikers. Young females, self-conscious in shorts, as well they might be, and pale-faced boys who are probably disciples of Karl Marx, from the London School of Economics. Regardless of their doom, the little victims play. Little do they know that in a few years they will be the gun-fodder of the next war, now being arranged by the poker-players of human destiny."

"Thanks for the walk," said Judy.

"Thanks for the talk," he replied. "I did all the talking, of course, and greatly enjoyed myself."

He smiled at her in a comradely way and strode off towards the house.

"How are you getting on?" asked Judy.

"I'm interested," said John. "This is as good as a stage play. These people are caricatures of themselves. It's like a scenario of English life handled by an American producer in Hollywood."

He added something which surprised his sister.

"I'm beginning to like Lady Anne of the Moated Grange rather better than I thought I should."

"I think she's sweet," said Judy.

It was the informality of things at Aldermere which appealed to John and put him at his ease. There was a certain rowdiness which was amusing, though perhaps rather childish. That fellow Bramley was always playing the fool with someone, and mostly with Lady Marjorie, whom he called Snooks. Before going to bed that night they had a desperate pillow-fight down one of the corridors. John put his head outside his door just as Lady Marjorie, in scarlet pyjamas, was about to fling a wet sponge at her opponent, who had hurled his pillow over the banisters. It was unfortunate for John that the sponge hit him in the face and doused him with water.

"Oh, sorry!" cried Lady Marjorie. "Bad shot!"

"Quite all right," said John. "Go to it. I'd like to join in."

"Pax!" cried Bramley. "The battle is over. And so to bed."

Earlier in the evening John had played Bridge with Lord and Lady Stanfield, with Anne as his partner. There had been the usual post-mortem, inevitable in family Bridge, leading to a certain amount of heated argument.

"Mother, you're hopeless!" Anne had cried at one point of the game. "Why do you call five hearts when you only had one court-card?"

"Sheer bluff, my dear!" said Lady Stanfield.

"Alice," said her husband, "you don't take this game seriously, and you've already let me down to the tune of one and sixpence, which I can ill afford."

Anne had a head for the game, as John observed, but was critical of his American conventions.

"I was taught to play according to the book," said John. "This isn't Snap or Happy Families."

"I'll say it isn't," said Anne, with a ridiculous imitation of his American accent. "Say, bo, what do you think about that? Be your age, kid. Oh yeah!"

"Anne," said Lady Stanfield, after a little splutter of mirth. "I don't think that's quite polite to an American guest."

"No, but it's damn' funny," said Anne. "And John doesn't mind; do you, John?"

John had minded a little. Her absurd pretence of speaking Broadway American, which she had learned from the movies, had failed to amuse him.

"I'm getting used to it," he said insincerely; "it makes me laugh."

Serious Bridge was out of the question. John's eyes had wandered round the room now and then, and again he had that sense of being an actor in a stage play. The room was panelled in white wood on which hung family portraits of old-fashioned folk in eighteenth-century costumes. Lord Stanfield looked less like a gamekeeper in an old dinner-jacket and crumpled shirt. His clean-shaven face, deeply tanned, with heavy eyebrows, was astoundingly like the portrait of a man in black with a white ruff round his neck above the fireplace.

Someone had turned on the radio, which was playing American jazz. Bramley danced a few steps to it with Judy at the end of the room. Young Viscount Ede was deep in a low arm-chair with his legs outstretched and his eyes closed as though asleep until suddenly he yawned, stretched himself, and called out a protest.

"Can't we turn off that noise and have some real music? Robin, old boy, tickle the keys for us."

"Must I?" asked Robin. "Judy Barton and I were doing rather well in this corner."

"Do play!" said Judy.

He played well without the book, anything they asked for, from Grand Opera to Schubert's songs.

"You ought to have been a pro, old boy," said young Ede. "You'd make a lot of money playing a piano outside my garage, and it might do the garage a bit of good."

"When I was a piano-tuner in West Kensington," said Bramley, "I used to make the dogs howl."

His sister Betty, who was in an evening frock in the crinoline style with bare shoulders, like one of the early-Victorian ladies in a Winterhalter print, leaned with her elbows on the piano and her chin cupped in her hands.

"Robin missed his vocation," she said.

"I've missed all my vocations," said Bramley, slipping into the *Cog d'Or*. "I once had a very good chance of being a gigolo at Cannes. Think of all the wealth I should have acquired from elderly harridans desiring the illusion of a second springtime!"

"What bilge Robin talks about himself!" said Anne, still at the Bridge table, but lending a listening ear.

John observed the scene over his cards. It was very English, he thought, and rather charming—that group gathered round the piano. They weren't worrying about an international situation which threatened their lives from time to time. In that day's newspaper there was serious news from Spain, and Winston Churchill had made a speech in the House of Commons on the weakness of the Royal Air Force in comparison with Germany's fevered production of aircraft. Mr. Winston Churchill had spoken with gloomy portent and deplored the years which the locusts had eaten. Over in Germany Hitler had made a speech glorifying National Socialism and full of dark menace, according to the Press in democratic countries. But these people in this old English house took it all very calmly. They were certainly not suffering from the jitters. On the contrary, they didn't seem to think about it. Didn't they read the papers? Or was it sublime confidence in the dear old British Navy and the sons of the

Bulldog breed? Those questions in his mind were partly answered on the following evening when two or three men gathered in His Lordship's study for whisky and other drinks.

It was John who led the conversation away from horses and dogs, and the invasion of the grey squirrel in Sussex woods.

"What do you think of the international situation, sir?" he asked his host.

Lord Stanfield blinked as though the question were too abrupt.

"Eh!" he answered. "Oh, Lord! I don't like the look of it, but then I don't know much about it."

"It seems to me," said John, trying to draw him out, "that democracy in Europe is in retreat. Won't it have to make a stand some day?"

"A stand?" asked Lord Stanfield. "If you mean put our fingers into other people's pies, I'm not for it. England's policy is peace. We can't afford another war. We're not ready for it. If it happens, it will make a nasty mess of things—worse than last time."

He looked round his study, with its panelling and crowded bookshelves, and laughed distressfully.

"I'd hate a bomb to come through this old roof and spoil my first editions," he said.

"I don't suppose England is for peace at any price," said John, rather too persistently.

It was Bramley who answered.

"That's my creed exactly. Peace at any price, and to hell with the Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, and other odd types of the human race. My innocent youth was spoilt by the last war. When I ought to have been playing marbles on the village green I was dragged off to the Somme and had two bullets through my left lung before I could ask the Germans to be kind to me. No more war for little Robin! It didn't settle any argument, and it massacred most of my contemporaries. A most foolish affair!"

John refused to take him seriously, seeing a smile about his lips.

"Isn't it a question between dictatorship and liberty? Won't you have to take sides or go under—now that Mussolini has got away with Abyssinia and Hitler with the reoccupation of the Rhineland? I can't see how you can dodge the issues much longer."

"Why shouldn't Hitler reoccupy the Rhineland?" asked young Ede, sitting on the edge of his father's table. "The Rhine is as German as Sussex is English."

"He violated the Locarno Treaty," said John. "Don't you believe in the sanctity of treaties?"

"Not damn-fool treaties which ought not to have been made," said young Ede carelessly.

"My conviction is," said Lord Stanfield, "that we ought to get on friendly terms with the Germans. They all seem to like us. I was in Bavaria last summer and every one was very decent. Hitler has offered fair terms of peace more than once. I think we've made a mistake in ignoring them. We ought to rewrite the Treaty of Versailles and try to get Germany back to the League. I said so the other day in the Lords."

"Hear, hear!" said Bramley. "If the Germans want their colonies back I would hand them Tanganyika as a Christmas present. That's to say I would, with a great show of generosity, give them back what ought not to have been taken from them. If they want Ireland they can have that too, with my blessing and kind regards."

John burst out laughing.

He was having his leg pulled, of course. Bramley was just amusing himself with an innocent abroad.

"In any case," asked young Ede, looking him in the eyes with a slight challenging smile, "what are the United States going to do about it, if anything? Haven't they dug themselves into a policy of isolation? Why do they seem to think that England has to police the whole world and fight for all

the small nations created by a Treaty with which their President had something to do, I believe?"

"Well, we needn't go into all that," said Lord Stanfield, as though anxious to avoid an argument. "The fact remains that England ought to try to break the evil spell of fear and suspicion which is at the bottom of all this rearmament. We can only do so on the old Liberal lines of give and take and a generous recognition of other people's needs. It's a question of intelligence and reasonable compromise."

John permitted himself one observation at this point.

"I doubt, sir, whether one can deal with men like Hitler on terms of intelligence. He has no respect for it. He works on primitive instinct and racial hatred."

Lord Stanfield made a surprising answer.

"I dislike many of his ideas, but I'm inclined to think we underrate his genius. I was talking to our Ambassador the other day, and he told me that Hitler is not so mad as we think he is. After all, he has done no end for Germany—practically eliminated unemployment and made them a united nation for the first time."

"It's these damned newspaper men who make all the trouble," said young Ede.

John answered quickly, without getting ruffled.

"I happen to be one of them."

There was a general laugh.

"Now you've dropped a brick, laddie," said Bramley, with great enjoyment. "I ought to have warned you."

"Sorry!" said young Ede. "I hadn't an idea——"

Lord Stanfield enjoyed the joke, but softened it.

"I'm afraid we were all speaking rather carelessly. Anne told me you were over here for the *New York Observer*. It beats me how well you fellows write. When they report my speeches in the House of Lords—not very frequently, thank God—they make them read quite well and take out all my split infinitives."

He drank an inch of whisky at the bottom of his glass and put his hand on John's shoulder.

"Let's join the ladies," he said. "They're always very bored without us."

It was all very illuminating. "These people," thought John, "only think of self-interest. They only think of dodging war at all costs, including honour. His Lordship doesn't want a bomb to spoil his first editions! That fellow Bramley wants to save his own skin. That Viscount laddie doesn't care a curse for democratic liberties. I'm in the house of the reactionaries. It's all very amusing!"

"Well," said Anne, sitting on the fender in the drawing-room, "have you settled world affairs and shocked American sensibilities?"

"Both," said Bramley with a laugh. "Frank dropped the most glorious brick. Everything, he said, was the fault of those damned newspaper men!"

"Not untrue," said Anne. "But John Barton of New York is one of those brilliant exceptions. He's a truth-teller. He's a faithful reporter of Great Britain to the United States. I'm going out of my way to make him fall in love with England."

She went out of her way a little that night to make him fall in love with her. It was when she spent some time in showing him the family portraits and old sporting prints. Once, when she led him into another room where there was a painting by Gainsborough, she held his hand for a moment to warn him of three steps down, and her touch sent a thrill up his arm. She looked beautiful, he thought, as she held a candle up to one of the pictures so that he could see it better in a dimly lit room.

"I hope you haven't been bored," she said. "We've no manners; we're all very casual with our guests."

He forgot his unfavourable verdict on the family.

"I've enjoyed every minute of it," he told her, "and Judy is enchanted with your old mansion."

"Well, you must come again," said Anne. "I've fallen for your sister Judy. She's as straight as a maypole—I mean in soul and spirit. How shall I find you out in London?"

"Say, now," said John, "I like to hear that, and if you'd

come to see us in Burton Court, Chelsea, we should call it a red-letter day."

"I'll come all right," said Anne. "Any excuse for going up to town, especially in the dark days fast approaching. An awful thought!"

Those last words took the fine edge off her compliment, but were not meant to be taken that way.

He held open the door for her as she passed through with her candlestick and he noticed again how well she carried herself with unaffected grace, and how charming she looked in her father's house. It was as though she had stepped out of one of the old frames. "Portrait of a Lady", by Romney. Strange to think that he should be walking by the side of Lady Anne in an old English mansion when not so long ago he had been hanging on to a strap in the subway of New York!

XVI

A FEW weeks after their week-end at Aldermere John and Judy were apprehensive of sudden death in the streets of Paris, owing to the reckless behaviour of a French taxi-driver and the apparent delirium of Parisian traffic.

Crossing the Place de la Concorde, John took off his hat for a moment, wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and laughed nervously.

"If we get to Lucy alive," he said, "I shall be agreeably surprised. That guy has nearly killed us four times and every driver in Paris seems to be addicted to homicidal mania. Otherwise I find it very interesting."

"I expect the traffic obeys some mysterious law," remarked Judy, "but I haven't got the clue to it. Oh! That was a near thing!"

A young Frenchman in a sports car came across their line of advance like a streak of lightning.

"*Sacré nom d'un chien !*" shouted their driver. "*Salé bête ! Imbécile !*"

He looked back at his passengers and raised both hands from his wheel with a gesture of pity and contempt for the idiocy of the whole human race.

By extraordinary good luck, aided by guardian angels, as it seemed to the two travellers, they arrived without damage at number ten, rue de la Pompe, Passy, some fifteen minutes drive beyond the Eiffel Tower, which they saw etched against the blue sky of Paris, and after mounting three flights of stairs they found the name of the Vicomte de Maresquel above an

electric bell-push. The Vicomtesse de Maresquel had once been Lucy Barton, of Moorfield, Massachusetts, and in another few moments she had flung herself into Judy's arms, laughing with wet eyes.

"Judy! I'm just mad with joy. How sweet you look, my dear! And there's John like an American hero in the *Saturday Evening Post*! I'm just crazy to see you both."

It was nice seeing Lucy again. She was the beauty of the family, but looked very French now, with her dark hair looped below her ears, and wearing a black dress cut to a Paris model, very plain but not without elegance. She talked excitedly, with movements of hands and fingers which she had never used in Massachusetts, and with little screams of laughter and gusts of tears. In the first half-hour, when they were alone with her, she passed up and down the scale of emotion in her description of life and experience as a lady in France.

Sometimes it was too awful, she said. Sometimes she had wanted to die because it was all so comical, so absurd, so fantastic. Louis, her husband, was just a baby. He had always been spoilt. If he had a touch of indigestion he thought he had cancer. If he cut his finger he thought he was going to bleed to death. If they had one of the inevitable little quarrels of married life he wept and went for comfort to his mother and aunts. He had innumerable aunts and cousins and second cousins. They were all very proud of their old titles. The Family was sacred to them. They gathered together for family councils at any time of crisis. Before her baby was born they went into conference in their own apartments or in hers. They were deeply anxious about Louis lest he should have a nervous breakdown. When her baby was born they conferred again about the ceremony of baptism, the child's name, and the problem of nursing the infant, who had had the honour of being born into their illustrious family.

Those family parties! They nearly killed her, said Lucy. They all sat round on gilt-backed chairs and talked for hours and hours. The grandmother of Louis, the Duchesse de

Contalmaison, demanded and received obedient homage. The mother of Louis had forgiven him for marrying an American girl, but over-emphasized this act of forgiveness. The uncles and aunts of Louis were not so tolerant. They might have pardoned him for marrying an American heiress, but not for conferring his title upon an American girl whose family had no available margin of dollars for the benefit of France. The United States, they thought, had betrayed them as they had betrayed France by refusing to guarantee French security after the war. The United States, they thought, was inhabited entirely by gunmen, racketeers and grafters. At least, it represented to them everything that was most vulgar and most uncivilized. Its only excuse had been its great wealth. After the crash on Wall Street and subsequent years of distress they had no further use for Americans. Many of them had invested in American securities and were now ruined, or at least in reduced circumstances. They were all as poor as church mice, partly owing to that misfortune, but partly because of the devaluation of the franc, which had still further impoverished them. They were convinced that France must have a dictatorship of the Right or go to pieces in a Communist revolution. They all read *L'Action Française*, the most reactionary paper in France, and talked about the Duc de Guise as though he might be crowned very shortly in Notre Dame. They hated Leon Blum, the French Premier, with a very cold loathing, and accused him of being hand in glove with Moscow for the overthrow of France and all its traditions of loyalty and order. They were, of course, Catholics, and Lucy's baby would be brought up in the Catholic faith.

"Poor old Lucy!" said John, unduly stricken by this narrative. "I'm afraid you made a bad mistake in marrying a good-looking Frenchman for his beautiful black eyes. Didn't I warn you?"

Lucy changed her tone. She changed her tone with extraordinary ease and lack of logic.

"Oh, don't think I'm unhappy, John! I get a lot of fun

out of it, and I shall never regret marrying Louis. He's a darling and we love each other devotedly, though now and then we quarrel about the Family and other little questions. We've many charming friends in Paris, and, after all, I have my little Louis-Philippe, who makes up for everything. He's adorable!"

John and Judy tip-toed into another room in this apartment in the rue de la Pompe and stood looking down upon the adorable Louis-Philippe, who at that moment was sound asleep in his cot. He looked to the cynical John astoundingly like a little monkey, with his dark hair and puckered face. To Judy he looked astoundingly like an angel—but certainly a French angel and un-American.

"I never thought I should be the uncle of a Frenchman," remarked John thoughtfully, when they had returned to the small salon, with its polished floors and its gilt-backed chairs—hideously uncomfortable.

"I'm becoming a perfectly good Frenchwoman," said Lucy. "I think in French. I even dream in French. I find myself taking the French point of view. Massachusetts seems a long way back in my life. Sometimes I weep when I get your letters. They're letters from my lost life, when I was Lucy Barton instead of the Vicomtesse de Maresquel."

She shed a few tears again, and then laughed again because, after all, life in Paris was enchanting, and Louis-Philippe was beginning to cut his teeth, and her husband Louis was devoted to her.

That young man appeared in due course from his office in the Department of Finance, where he earned an insignificant salary. With his dark eyes and pale face and little black moustache he was not bad-looking, and had a certain fineness of feature, in which, perhaps, was a touch of weakness.

He embarrassed his brother-in-law by kissing him on both cheeks and patting his back with great affection, before raising Judy's hand to his lips and expressing his pleasure at seeing her again.

"Lucy and I," he said, in very good English, "are terribly excited at having you in Paris. My family has the great desire to meet you. We must arrange a few little parties. My mother wishes me to convey her compliments and hopes that you will take coffee with her one evening when there will also be some of my relatives."

"Oh, Louis, must we?" cried Lucy in French. "I want to have John and Judy all to myself."

Louis considered it inevitable that they should meet his relatives.

Lucy and her husband took lunch that day with John and Judy at their hotel in the rue St. Philippe du Roule, not far from the Madeleine. They took many lunches with John and Judy during their stay in Paris, and the French family, so desirous to see them, restricted themselves in hospitality to tea in very small but precious cups, and coffee served in apartments furnished in the style of Louis-Quinze with a faint fragrance of floor-polish and pot-pourri.

"It's the French economy," explained Lucy. "They're all terribly impoverished."

To Judy in private John expressed his pity for Lucy.

"I'm afraid she made a bad break. Louis has no more guts than a skinned rabbit. He's all nerves and self-pity, combined with intellectual arrogance and insolent contempt for everything American. He regards us as utter barbarians."

"Lucy adores him," said Judy. "And after all, John, French civilization is older than ours, and I dare say we seem very crude to the French aristocracy"

"Give me crudeness," said John.

The relatives were somewhat trying, and as most of them did not speak English, conversation was limited as far as John was concerned, though Judy was astonishingly good, having studied French at Smith College with the help of a very charming friend who had been brought up in France. The Duchesse de Contalmaison, a lady of emotional character and delicate beauty, was formidable in her frigid courtesy and condescen-

sion. Lucy's mother-in-law was obviously of opinion that her poor son had made a *mésalliance*, and, moreover, was undernourished owing to the inability of American wives to provide well-cooked food. Several aunts appeared, all in deep black, as though recently bereaved, which, Lucy said, was not true. They were still mourning for fathers and brothers killed in a war which was now more than eighteen years ago.

Fortunately, this air of gloom was relieved by a few younger people, cousins of Louis, who were modern in their minds and manners, and not unattractive. One of them was a young man named Paul de Brissac, who had a pretty sister, very gay and vivacious when not overawed by her elderly relatives. Paul himself was a good-looking young man, who spoke excellent English, having been at the French Embassy in London for two or three years. He showed a desire to be friendly with John, and at their first meeting dared to be a little humorous on the subject of his relations, who were sitting in a semicircle on straight-backed chairs sipping a hot liquid which was reputed to be tea.

"I find these family receptions deplorable!" he said in a confidential voice. "To an American they must seem ridiculous. So much formality! So much deference! And yet they are all living in a past world which no longer exists. Their titles mean nothing. Their political opinions cut no ice, as you say in America. Public opinion in France has moved away from them, and their Duc de Guise is only a ghost, who is quite comical in the Republic of Leon Blum."

"What do you think of Blum?" asked John, who had read a good deal about the French Premier.

Paul de Brissac smiled and glanced towards his relatives.

"If my distinguished aunts were to hear me express a word in his favour they would regard me as a traitor. All the same, I recognize his intelligence. He has shown some courage in resisting the extreme demands on the Left, upon whose support he rests. In international affairs he is a patriotic Frenchman,

although a Jew, and therefore sympathetic to Soviet Russia. In domestic politics he stands to some extent as a barrier against Communism and revolutionary violence."

John was somewhat impressed by this young man's cynicism and frankness, and invited him with his sister to little dinner parties which included Louis and Lucy and himself. They went sometimes to a restaurant off the Champs-Élysées, which was in the style of a Breton inn, with sham beams and a big open fireplace at which the French chef roasted his chickens before the eyes of his customers. It had an air of false simplicity belied by the appearance of its customers, many of whom wore evening frocks and dinner-jackets. Now and again Paul de Brissac pointed out a French celebrity and for each one had a word of satire or a tale of scandal.

"Look at that fellow in the crumpled shirt-front, with his table-napkin tucked under his chin. He can well afford his meal, being one of the biggest swindlers on the Bourse! He can well afford to keep that pretty lady who has the pleasure of being his mistress. She is one of the dancers in the Russian Ballet.

"Regard that young man with a little black moustache sitting next to the girl whose frock is bare-backed. He is one of our famous film actors, and was the husband of a Rumanian heiress of great fortune, who divorced him because of his habitual infidelities. He earns more than a steel manufacturer, but ten years ago was living in a garret in Montmartre at the expense of a girl who sold flowers in the market by the Madeleine. They say he is a cocaine addict.

"Look at that *sale type* who has just come in with that yellow-haired *grue*. He is the editor of a Communist newspaper and a Communist Deputy in the Chamber. That is to say he is subsidized by Moscow to support the gospel of Karl Marx, which Moscow has abandoned. You will see that he is particular about what he drinks. You will see that he ends his meal with old brandy. As a Communist he believes in living according to the best style of Capitalism, as long as that infamous

system exists ! Needless to say, he knows that his propaganda is harmless in a country which is solidly bourgeois."

"In New York," said John, "we're taught to believe that France is on the edge of revolution and that Communism is ready for a clash against Fascism in the streets of Paris and other French cities."

Paul de Brissac permitted himself a polite laugh.

"My dear friend, that is how foreign countries are deceived by their journalists. Forgive me if I say so. It is true that there are Communists in Paris, Lille, Amiens, Lyons and Marseilles. But they have never read Karl Marx, and they do not believe in the equality of the class war. They are all little capitalists with something in the stocking. It is all theoretical nonsense—a professional game—to give them something to talk about, with an occasional demonstration against the police to maintain the tradition of the French, which is always against the Government. What they want is more wages for less work. It is true also that there are Fascists in France who march about and get into street rows as a little advertisement. They issue manifestoes. They sell *L'Action Française* to my maiden aunts outside the churches. They buy second-hand pistols and wound themselves occasionally in loading them. But France is still ruled by intelligence and by the French sense of humour. These boys who make a noise in the streets do not represent the French people, who remain solidly between the extremes; contemptuous of the Extreme Left and the Extreme Right, loyal to the Republic, patient and long-suffering because of political corruption among all parties and politicians."

Lucy was distressed that evening because Louis was not dining with them. He had telephoned through from the Department of Finance to say that he would be kept late at the office and would not be back until midnight.

"I think it is a shame!" cried Lucy. "And they don't pay him anything extra for overtime. He will come back utterly exhausted."

"There must be a crisis in the Department of Finance," said Paul de Brissac, with a faint smile which seemed to convey some ironical meaning. John noticed that he glanced at his sister Virginie, who raised her eyebrows and returned his smile.

"Probably," said Virginie, in the same light, ironical way, "the Government is about to devalue the franc again, in which case I shall have to do without a new frock and a winter jacket. It looks as though Louis is becoming very important in the Department of Finance."

"I'm always so sorry if he can't say good night to little Louis-Philippe," said Lucy.

Virginie de Brissac, who had a fine high forehead, a very straight little nose and a charming roguish mouth, laughed for a moment and then touched Lucy's hand in a caressing way.

"Little American mother," she said, with real tenderness. "If ever I have a child I hope to be as devoted to its welfare as you are, *ma chérie*. But I shall not expect my husband to come home every evening to kiss its little toes before it goes to sleep."

"Louis has all the virtues of a husband and father," said Paul de Brissac.

"*Bien entendu!*" agreed Virginie. "He is a model, is he not? But this is a foolish conversation. Let us talk about something serious. Let us talk about the romance of a Royal love-affair which I find very exciting. Is it possible that Madame Simpson will become the Queen of England? To me it is incredible, from all I know of English Society."

"They say she is very charming," said Judy, from her end of a little table covered with a cloth of red-and-white check.

It was a successful subject of conversation until it was time to take a taxi to the Russian Ballet.

Paris put its spell on John Barton, who had read some history at Harvard and was a student of humanity. While Judy and Lucy were fussing about with little Louis-Philippe—that monkey-like infant—or talking on tin chairs in the

Luxembourg Gardens while this babe slept in a perambulator, he wandered along the Seine and turned over old books and prints on the stalls along the *quais*, where, below the embankment, French labourers, stripped to the waist, were handling big blocks of stone for the repair of one of the bridges. He stood bare-headed in Notre Dame and thought of all the ghosts of French history whom he could summon back—with many gaps—to his imagination and memory: Henri Quatre, Richelieu, Mazarin, Marie Antoinette. He strolled into the Palais Royal and looked at the statue of Camille Desmoulins, very lifelike and dramatic, as once on this spot he had called upon the crowd to march to the Bastille. He went down the rue St. Honoré searching for the house where Robespierre—the “Sea-green Incorruptible”, as Carlyle called him—lived during the Reign of Terror, when the aristocrats passed this way to the guillotine, ticked off for execution. When he had read those things as a student they had seemed very remote in history, but more frightful things in the way of political terror had happened in Russia and were happening now in Spain, due to the same causes of passion, vengeance and fanaticism.

He explored the Left Bank and its student quarters around the University, and sat outside café-restaurants studying their types, true to student life everywhere in Europe—very poor, very gay, very noisy, and very hungry. He was astonished at the number of coloured men who passed—some of them with French women and half-bred children. In the Louvre he gazed at the enigmatical smile of Mona Lisa, and halted with admiration before the “Winged Victory”. These people of France, he thought, had a tradition of civilization which the world would miss if it were lost. There was something Latin about them. Rome had touched their spirit, though they forgot its central-heating system and public baths.

Lunching alone after these expeditions, or with Lucy and Judy, he wondered whether France still maintained its sense of art and love of beauty. Paris was beautiful from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, but its back streets

were mouldering with perceptible decay. Like his father's house in Moorfield, Massachusetts, the old houses of Paris—except in the smart quarters—needed a new touch of paint and plaster, and the people who came hurrying by were mostly shabby and ill-dressed compared with similar crowds in New York. They looked harassed and worried, and not too physically fit. What was weighing on their minds? Only the students laughed, and even some of those looked underfed and pale and pimply, and over-strained by the anxieties of life. What was biting them? he wondered.

Some answers to these questions were given to him by Paul de Brissac, when they sat one night outside the Dôme in Montparnasse, where the chairs on the *terasse* were crowded with the intellectual and artistic confraternity of Paris, among whom were several young American men and women, got up to look more French than the French, and sipping liquids which looked very poisonous and had an exciting effect upon the conversation of these clients, who talked and laughed too loudly.

Judy and Lucy, with Virginie de Brissac, had gone to the Comédie Française for a performance of Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, which was no good to John as he could not understand French. Louis had given notice that he expected to be late at the office again owing to the continued crisis in French finances, so that John had accepted Paul de Brissac's invitation to a drink at the Dôme after dinner in a little restaurant in the Boul' Mich'. It was an autumn evening and not too warm, but braziers were burning on the *terasse*, and it was pleasant sitting there watching life pass, talking intelligently, and getting something of the spirit of Paris in this scene and atmosphere.

"This is a long way from New York," said John reflectively, as he glanced around him and observed the behaviour of a group sitting at the table next to him. Judging from the beards and unkempt hair of the men, they were certainly artists of some kind, or posing as artists. One of them,

without a beard and less unkempt, had a rather noble face, very grave and thoughtful, and kept aloof from his companions, who chatted to their women and shared their drinks. The sleeve of his left arm was empty and pinned across his breast.

"You are lucky in being an American," said Paul de Brissac presently. "I should like to find a job in New York."

"Why do you say that? To flatter my American conceit?"

"Not at all," said Paul. "I say so because I hear the hoofs of the Four Horsemen riding in the distance and wish to escape in time from what is inevitably coming."

"You think it is coming, that war?" asked John.

Paul de Brissac was quite sure it was coming, and didn't like the prospect. In the last war less than twenty years ago his father and two of his brothers had been killed. Many of his cousins had been killed. He had a foolish wish to live.

He touched John on the arm and lowered his voice.

"Do you see that fellow with an empty sleeve? Why do you think he sits there so silently, so deeply in thought? I will tell you. He lost his arm at Verdun, or on the Somme, or somewhere else along the line. He is thinking of his dead comrades, and of all the horrors he saw. He hears, as I do, the hoofs of the Four Horsemen riding in the distance and coming closer. There are millions of men in France who are thinking like that. The old ones remember what they saw. The young ones wonder whether they will be dead before they have drunk deeply of life. That is not a good mentality with which to pursue one's avocations.

"The English," said John, "refuse to believe in war's inevitability. They think it can be dodged—even, perhaps, at the price of losing a little honour or a little self-respect."

Paul de Brissac laughed and took one of John's "Camels".

"The English," he said, "are not so stupid as they seem. I came to know them a little. They have an inarticulate wisdom which is lacking, perhaps, in France. We are more intellectual but less wise. England has a genius for compromise and

avoiding unnecessary clashes. That is why we call her *perfidie Albion*, though we ourselves are devoted to our own self-interests and feel very grieved if other nations do the same. But all that is beside the mark. The brutal fact is that Germany has rearmed and feels her strength and that the French system of alliances in Europe has broken down. What, then, is going to happen?"

"I'd like to know," said John.

Paul de Brissac had no doubt on the subject.

"Germany is putting back the clock," he said. "She is putting it back as far as the Dark Ages, when her tribes were the outer barbarians whom Caesar fought. They were touched for a time by the Latin spirit. They were Christianized and, therefore civilized, with Rome as the spiritual headquarters of civilization and moral law. But it was a veneer which did not go deep. There is in the German soul still the ancient paganism of their dark forests. Unknown to themselves, Wotan is still their god. This man Hitler is the personification of the old pagan chief. His Nazis are the braves of the German tribes. They are out to smash the Latin tradition in which they were held for a thousand years. They will crucify Christ again. With the hammer of Thor they will try to smash Latin and Christian civilization, as once they invaded Rome and tore down its temples."

John stared at him in some surprise. He was no longer talking lightly with humorous cynicism. For the first time he was speaking with profound gravity and emotion.

"I hadn't got as far as that," said John. "I only thought of a struggle between democracy and dictatorship."

Paul de Brissac shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no patience with that nonsense! This is a much more serious affair. I do not believe much in democracy, anyhow. It is largely an illusion. What does democracy mean to France when half her politicians are professional office-seekers and dupe the people into the belief that they are governing themselves? I believe more in the spirit and

tradition of peoples. The clash, when it comes, will not be political, but moral and spiritual. It will be the struggle of Christendom against the resurrection of paganism. Unfortunately, we shall be the victims of a frightful paradox, which I find amusing but distressing."

"How?" asked John.

"It is that we shall fight for the Christian spirit in alliance with Soviet Russia, which is a Godless state. Perhaps for that reason we shall lose and go down into the dark pit. God will not be mocked."

For a moment or two he stared across the pavement outside the Dôme café to the neon signs of a restaurant and the lurid glare of advertisements of Dubonnet and Amer Picon, and his expression was that of deep melancholy. Then suddenly he pulled himself back to his habitual mood and laughed light-heartedly.

"I have been talking like a Hebrew prophet! It is perhaps because I have a light stomach-ache due to eating that lobster at dinner. Join me in another cognac, *mon vieux*."

Suddenly, a few minutes later, he put his hand on John's arm and gave an exclamation in French, followed by a quiet laugh.

"*Ciel!*"

"What's wrong?" asked John.

"Look at that taxi which is just arriving. There is the admirable Louis with a little lady who is beautiful but not, I think, respectable."

"I thought he was working late," said John.

Paul de Brissac smiled.

"The Department of Finance," he said, "allows its officials to leave at six o'clock, or at latest seven. The Civil Service in France is well organized, and does not ask my cousin Louis to burn the midnight oil, especially as he has no head for arithmetic."

Louis, Vicomte de Maresquel, paid off his taxi and gave his hand to a lady in an evening cloak of green silk. They threaded

their way through the tables and went inside the Dôme, where it was warm and well lighted.

"Do you mean to say . . ." asked John, with a sense of outrage.

"My dear fellow," said Paul de Brissac, "there are moments when one sees nothing and says nothing. It is one of those moments."

"That's fine for you," said John, "but Lucy happens to be my sister."

"Do you wish to break her heart, *mon vieux*? She adores her lovely Louis. It is better that she should think him over-worked. I assure you I have some experience in these things. There is an English proverb which I do not well remember. It is: 'Where ignorance is good it's unhappy to be wise.' There is also a French proverb which I find very comforting: '*Tout savoir, c'est tout pardonner*'. Shall we move on somewhere? There is a very good Russian orchestra in a place near here. They sing Russian folk songs which are exquisite in their harsh and primitive spirit."

He allowed John to pay for the drinks.

XVII

SOME weeks after their return from Paris Judy Barton received a letter from home which caused her some distress, though John saw no cause for anxiety. It was from her mother, and hinted that her father was fretting for her return.

Pop is not very happy with himself [wrote Mrs. Barton]. I am worried about his loss of appetite. Last night Mrs. Cassidy served up a dish of baked clams, which he likes so much, but he only picked at them and then pushed his plate away. I think he's dejected by the failure of Mr. Roosevelt to relieve the depression and by no immediate sign that trade returns are on the upgrade. Alfred Feversham was here last night, full of pep as usual and denouncing Mr. Roosevelt for his attack on the Supreme Court, which Alfred thinks is high treason to the Constitution. Pop didn't have much comeback and I felt sorry for him. But I'm afraid the real trouble with him is that home life is not the same without you. He misses you terribly, my dear, though he doesn't say a word about cutting short your lovely time in England, and taking you away from dear John, who would be lost without you. We read his articles in the New York Observer and think them terribly good, though a little depressing, because of his criticism of English thought and its weakness in the handling of foreign affairs. It's wonderful what a lot John seems to know! I'm mighty proud of being his mother, especially when I hear him praised by our Boston friends. And I'm glad you found dear Lucy so happy with her husband and baby boy. One of these fine days I must take a trip to Europe to see my first grandchild, but that joy will have to wait until

things are looking brighter ! Did I tell you about that strange message that came through a Red Indian chief at the séance held in Mrs. Westmacott's house in Chestnut Street ? He said that he had been speaking to Julius Caesar, who didn't like the way things were shaping in Europe and warned the United States that a swarm of men birds with stings in their tails would fly over New York and drop eggs of death. Very remarkable, don't you think ? It makes me feel uneasy, especially when one reads of so much trouble in the world. But now I must go and see that film Mr. Deeds Comes to Town, which they say is delightful and full of uplift.

When Judy had read this letter to her brother after its arrival at the breakfast-table she folded it up and spoke distressfully.

"John, I must go back home ! Father wants me. When does the next boat sail ?"

"What's all this hurry ?" asked John, over his copy of *The Times*. "And how am I going to keep alive if you go rushing back to Massachusetts because the Old Man has lost his appetite for Mrs. Cassidy's baked clams ?"

"Sorry, John," said Judy firmly. "I have a hunch that Father isn't well. I should never forgive myself——"

"Be your age, kid," said John, laughing at her. "What's the use of letting your imagination get morbid because Father has a touch of gastric trouble ? Aren't you having a fine time here playing around in Robert Bramley's studio—going to dances with his sister Betty—meeting the intellectual laddies of Bloomsbury, and taking joyrides with Lady Anne, who seems to have a crush on you ? It's a gay life, isn't it ? Why make a dash for domestic drudgery when there's no need for it for at least another month or two ?"

"I'm off," said Judy. "A still, small voice bids me pack up and book the steamer tickets ! So sorry, John. You know I don't want to leave you. Do you think I can get a passage on the *Queen Mary*, which leaves on Wednesday ?"

"Now, I call that rushing things," he exclaimed, showing

some annoyance. "Isn't Anne Ede coming to dine with us on Wednesday night?"

Judy soothed him down.

"You can take her to the Écu de France. I shall think of you having a good time. You know you're getting fond of her."

She looked mischievously at John, who flushed a little.

"Getting fond of her?" he asked. "Well, that's pretty good! She and I haven't an idea in common."

"That makes it interesting for both of you," said Judy.

"And talking of fondness," said John, knowing that the best form of defence is attack, "how about you and Robin, as you call him? When is he going to make a respectable woman of you? I'm getting uneasy about all this studio stuff, unless it leads to marriage and Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March'."

"John!" cried Judy, laughing with a kind of vexation. "Haven't you grown up yet? Aren't we both old enough to make friends without suspecting sex stuff? Robin is trying to make a good job of my head, which he finds interesting, and I've been painting one of his old ladies and getting on rather well, he says. There's nothing more than that in it."

"I'll take your word for it, my child," said John good-humouredly. "But how am I going to carry on this flat if you suddenly abandon me in my old age and hour of need? I'm off to the distressed areas in a day or two. What happens to Mrs. Pockett in my absence? She'll probably invite her friends from the corner pub to a radio party in these rooms. They'll probably steal the silver and go to bed drunk in their boots. I shall probably starve to death, anyway, if you're not here to do the marketing."

Judy was not impressed by these doleful prophecies.

"Mrs. Pockett is very reliable. She'll mother you."

John repudiated this idea with some violence.

"I don't want to be mothered by Mrs. Pockett! That old woman talks a language I don't understand and keeps on

talking. All I can gather is that her husband was killed in the last war and that she worships the Royal Family."

Judy had made up her mind. When Judy had made up her mind no argument could shake her. John knew the game was lost when she rang up the shipping office for a berth in the *Queen Mary*, sailing in two days' time.

Inside her own mind, so firm and resolute in this decision, Judy hid more emotion than she had allowed John to guess. She had hoped for at least another month in England, and had a sense of anguish that even another month would soon go and bring to an end this English adventure which she found enchanting. It had been a wonderful escape from the narrow home life in Massachusetts, which had begun to smother her in its little drudgeries and narrowness. She had met many interesting people from the moment she had stepped on to the *Queen Mary*. Here in London she had had many doors opened to her and met all kinds of English types and personalities, all of whom had been terribly nice to her. Mr. Speed in John's London office gave little dinner parties, where she met some of the people who pulled the wires of this puppet play, to use John's favourite simile—politicians and social leaders who had talked to her seriously as though she were on their own level of intelligence.

John was sometimes rather cynical and critical of them and had not quite got over his prejudice against their English voices and accent, which seemed to him affected and insincere. It was rather absurd of John. She found them quite simple and without any pose. She even discovered a sense of humour, which was not so smart and quick as its American counterpart, but which played through their conversation like a will-o'-the-wisp. Some of the English girls she had met had seemed to her more thoughtful than girls of their own age in her own country, and less concerned with sex. Now and then in Bloomsbury and Chelsea she had thought some of them slightly decadent, or hard and unfeminine, but they were exceptions, she was certain. She found a sweetness and

gentleness in the English people, even in casual conversation over shop-counters, or in the buses and markets and streets.

In this short time, now coming to an end because of the call back to her father and mother, she had made friends whom she would miss when she had gone from them. Anne Ede was one of them ; though, of course, it was easy to see that she was interested in John and greatly attracted by him. John was very rude to her sometimes, and perhaps it was that American bluntness which amused her and attracted her, as well as his tall figure and good looks. She teased him in order to make him sulky. She criticized the United States in order to make him vexed. After that week-end at Aldermere she had made several excuses to come round to Burton Court for these conversational exercises, sometimes as late as half past ten or eleven, after a theatre or dance in town, bringing with her some good-looking boy, or discarding him at the entrance to this block of flats. John still pretended that he detested her, though it was perfectly obvious that he was losing his heart to her and thought her exquisite. She could see it in his eyes. Anne Ede herself was quite aware of it, and the more he quarrelled with her the better she liked it. Poor old John ! She led him up the garden path and enjoyed herself greatly. Perhaps an American was a new game for her, but this intellectual flirtation was not vicious or heartless. Anne Ede was really as straight as an arrow and almost as blunt as John, though in the English way, with just a little touch of arrogance and condescension, due, perhaps, to her upbringing and family pride.

It had all been good fun in London ! The best fun had been in Robin's studio. She would miss that terribly. Robin thought rather well of her work, although he pulled it to pieces and was frightfully rude about it sometimes. But it was the rudeness of a fellow-craftsman, impatient of seeing something wrong in what might be good, and really kind and generous in giving away his own experience and technique. Lately she had been painting one of his models, another old woman in

the mews, very different in type to the one he called the Duchess of Knightsbridge. She was a thin, little old woman, with white hair and bright blue eyes and thousands of tiny wrinkles on her face and hands. Robin had said, "If you can do those wrinkles you'll make a giddy masterpiece," but Robin had been pleased with it as far as it went. Now she would have to leave it unfinished, and he wouldn't have time to finish his own portrait of her, upon which he had been working so intently that sometimes, while they both painted, not a word passed between them for half an hour at a time.

It had been a real comradeship. In this short time she had come to like this humorous man very deeply. It had all been quite unsentimental. Never once had he been remotely "fresh" with her. He was always amusing and frank, with just that touch of fantastic humour which left her guessing sometimes. He had that boyishness which belonged, she noticed, to many Englishmen, even when getting old—a refusal to be serious for any length of time, a passion for absurd games demanding a little skill. Once he had abandoned work to play a game called "shove-ha'penny", which he had taught her. They had played for an hour or more with the old woman who was her model, and Robin had become as excited as a schoolboy because he won eighteenpence from her, which he poured into the wrinkled hand of the old dame as an addition to her usual fee.

Now that she was going to his studio for the last time she remembered ridiculous little incidents like this. She remembered his infatuation for gambling on horses. Every afternoon he put a few shillings on a horse which he chose for absurd reasons based on hunches. Once he had won five pounds and took her to dinner at a restaurant in Jermyn Street on the proceeds of this luck. That was on the night when John had gone away to Kent to get an interview with one of England's elder statesmen. It had been an amusing dinner. He had kept her laughing most of the time by his conversation with the waiters, who seemed to adore him because he knew the names

of their wives and babies and villages in Italy from which they had come. Now she was going to say good-bye to him and felt sad about it.

He had left a pencilled note fastened to the door of his studio with a drawing-pin.

Back in half an hour. Mrs. Martindale ill in bed. Please give the cat some milk. R.B.

Mrs. Martindale was the old woman with the wrinkles. Judy was sorry not to say good-bye to her. The studio door was open, and that was very careless of its owner, although if he had shut it she would have had to wait on the mat with the milk.

Judy went into the studio and took off her hat. She felt dejected at not having one more sitting for her portrait, which wasn't too bad, she thought, now that she saw it for the last time perhaps.

"I've been happy here," she said to the black cat, which lay on one of Robin's rugs before the fireplace. "Presently it will seem like a dream."

She looked about her with a kind of intensity. She must try and fix it all in her mind, she thought—every little thing in this big room in a London mews where she had had such fun. She would remember the pattern of the Persian rugs, and the shape of the silver pots on the mantelshelf—Robin had won them for rowing at Henley—and the colour of the curtains, and the faint smell of old wood and tobacco smoke, and outside the rattle of a piano-organ playing *O Sole Mio* with variations.

There was one thing which she hadn't seen yet. It was the framed canvas with its face to the wall. Robin had not been keen for her to look at it. Perhaps he thought that it was one of his "daubs" which hadn't come off. Probably it was good. He couldn't do anything really bad, she thought.

She swung the picture round and looked at it. It was the portrait of a pretty woman with bare arms in an evening frock

of rose silk. He had evidently laboured over it. The face was finely painted and there was laughter in the eyes and about the mouth. He had done the dress with more care and finish than in most of his portraits. She knew the woman's face. It was the pretty woman who had been in the *Queen Mary* and who had come down to Aldermere for lunch with her husband, the Earl of Munstead, that very handsome Englishman. Robin had said, "Hullo, Vera!" in answer to her "Hullo, Robin!" There had been that flutter of eyelashes and a look in her eyes which had made Judy think, "She's in love with Robin!"—and then had been vexed with herself for thinking such nonsense. It was a fine portrait but a spoilt one. Someone had slashed it across the face with a palette-knife. Two slashes, one each way, making a cross all across the canvas and the woman's face.

"I wonder why he did that," said Judy, staring at it.

She turned its face to the wall again and wondered if she would ask him why he had slashed it, and then decided that he might not like to be asked.

He came in as she was sitting on the floor watching the black cat lapping up the milk, which she had poured into its saucer.

"Hullo, Judy!" he cried cheerily. "Sorry to be out when you came. Old Mother Martindale took a bump from a taxi-cab last night and I went to see how her old bones were getting on. You'll have to postpone the progress of your giddy masterpiece for a few days."

Judy stood up and made a tragic announcement.

"My giddy masterpiece will never be finished, Robin."

"Don't be silly, woman," he answered, as he flung an old felt hat on to the sofa by the fireplace. "It's going well under my brutal criticism. Getting disheartened?"

"Going away," said Judy. "I'm sailing for New York to-morrow."

Robert Bramley raised his humorous eyebrows.

"No, you're not," he told her firmly. "I haven't nearly

done with you. I don't mind your legs going to New York, but I want your head for at least another fortnight. Besides, I like your companionship. What'll I do if I can't talk nonsense to you? Are you going to thrust me back into my loathed melancholy?"

"My father wants me," said Judy.

Robert Bramley thought that an inadequate reason for sudden flight.

"Selfish old man! Send him a cable and tell him that fathers mustn't be vampires! 'Dear Father. I'm quite happy here. Stop. The well-known English painter Robert Bramley is making a very good job of my head. Stop. His need is greater than thine. Stop. Your loving Judy.'"

"Perhaps I'll come back again next year," said Judy, smiling faintly at this imaginary cablegram.

Robin refused to envisage that distant date.

"Next year? Great God, woman, what are you talking about? Why, next year we may all be dead! London may be lying in dust and ashes with crowded corpses in its ruins. This London slum may be no more than a rubble-heap after German aeroplanes have done their job with us. Mrs. Martindale may be an angel in heaven wearing a golden crown as cockeyed as she wears the hat she fished out of a dustbin. In these uncertain times no man or woman may talk of next year. Now get into that chair and let me hear no more of that nonsense."

"I've just ten minutes," said Judy. "I've a lot of packing to do. I've come to say good-bye, Robin, and thanks for the good time I've had with you. I shall never forget it."

Robert Bramley spent nine of those ten minutes refusing to believe that she would sail to New York and leave him with an unfinished portrait on his hands. He intended to send it to the Paris Salon, which hung his work sometimes, owing to his friendship with a waiter in the rue Montmartre who knew a little model in Montparnasse, who knew a member of the hanging committee.

"I'll write to you now and then, if I may," said Judy.

"My spirit will come back to this room all the way from Massachusetts."

"No good to me," said Robin brutally. "If I feel your ghostly presence I shall just sneeze and think it's another of those damned draughts. I want your head and that funny little nose of yours, and that elusive smile which I can't get on to the canvas. Besides, who's going to give the cat its milk when I have to go out? It's cruelty to animals. It's cruelty to artists."

"Give Betty my love," said Judy. "Tell her I'm sorry I couldn't say good-bye."

Robert Bramley became serious for once.

"Joking apart, I feel very hipped about this! Can't you bring your father back to England? I've liked having you here in this dirty old mews. We've laughed quite a lot together, haven't we? I shall miss you hellishly."

"Thanks," said Judy. "I want to be missed."

She held out her hand to say good-bye, and for a moment there was a sudden mist of tears in her eyes, spoiling her smile.

"Good-bye, Robin."

"No," he said grumpily, "not good-bye. I decline to believe you won't be back after a week or two."

"No chance of that!" said Judy.

He took her hand and then drew her towards him and kissed her cheek.

"Plain Judy!" he said, with humorous tenderness. "You and I are good pals, aren't we? You don't mind that brotherly salute?"

"I like it," said Judy. "But why so brotherly?"

He laughed and looked a little surprised.

"Eh? Oh, well!"

She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him and fled.

He called out after her on the stairs.

"Judy! I say—— Hi, woman!"

"Good-bye, Robin!" she called back.

Out in the mews she walked away quickly with a flushed face and shining eyes and wet eyelashes. She hated going away like this.

A pretty lady was standing in the mews talking to a man outside one of the garages.

"Can you tell me which is number ten?"

The man jerked his hand in the direction of Robert Bramley's studio.

"Three doors down. Painted blue."

It was the Countess of Munstead, whose portrait was in Robin's studio, slashed across the face.

She didn't see Judy, who hurried past.

XVIII

It was a blow to John when Judy departed from him so suddenly, but his sense of loneliness was alleviated by journalistic work which kept him busy and by English journeys in search of facts and ideas for his articles in the *New York Observer*.

One of those journeys was to the distressed areas in Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. It dejected him because of the utter waste of life in these mining districts where the mines had closed down and there was no work of any kind in these villages grouped around slag-heaps and mine-shafts. Hundreds of thousands of men were living on the "dole", just enough for life but without any margin for comfort and happiness. Many of them had been like that for years, getting listless, losing the strength of their muscles and their own moral fibre. Crowds of young men were hanging around the labour exchanges, never having done a day's work, not for lack of will but for lack of opportunity. Here and there something was being done for them, but not enough. John was taken round by a young social worker who motored him from village to village and told him of all the activities of social service which were in progress to bring a little help to these distressed areas and some kind of rescue from utter degradation.

"It's boredom that gets them down," said this young man. "We encourage them to learn handicrafts and get busy making boots and furniture and toys—anything that gives them a sense of doing something worth while for their own families.

I'll take you to see some of our workshops and I'll show you villages where the men are toiling to bring a little beauty into their lives by turning the slag-heaps into playgrounds, and growing flowers, and making football fields. They work like beavers with any encouragement. The worst of it is we're terribly short of funds for providing raw materials."

John saw some of this and was impressed particularly with the allotments round Newcastle and other towns where the unemployed men grew vegetables on small plots of English soil.

"You can't drag them away," said his guide. "They're on the job so long as there's light. Each cabbage is like one of their own children."

"It's pitiful!" exclaimed John. "It's a disgrace to England. Why can't the men be absorbed in the industrial life of the country?"

"I agree," said the young social worker. "The Government is lying back and doing nothing in a big way to help these districts."

"Why don't they follow the lead of King Edward?" asked John. "Didn't he say something must be done? I take my hat off to that young fellow for not letting people forget these distressed districts. He shows a human sympathy and has the democratic spirit."

The young man at the wheel driving down a road in Yorkshire was silent for a moment.

"Some people think he's acting unconstitutionally," he said. "I must say I'm all for him. But of course this isn't a simple problem. Aren't there something like fifteen million unemployed in the United States? Mr. Roosevelt doesn't seem to find it easy to set the wheels going again."

This time John was silent and remained thoughtful for several miles. There was something in what this young fellow had said. Things were not too good in America, in spite of N.R.A. and other efforts to restore industry. The whole world had got wrong somehow. The old rhythm of life had broken

down. It was due to all this intense nationalism putting up barriers between the nations, piling up tariffs, and every obstruction to world trade. The United States hadn't given a good lead in that way. Its tariff system shut out other people's goods.

"I guess all these men around here are pretty Red, aren't they?" he asked presently.

The young social worker, who spoke with an Oxford accent, laughed at this question.

"You might think so. But as a matter of fact they've no use whatever for Communism or Red revolution. Why, the other day, when a crowd of them had finished building a sports pavilion, they sent out an S O S for the largest Union Jack which anyone might offer to give them to crown the work! If any Communist arrives from London to preach the gospel of Karl Marx he gets a pretty rough handling and goes back quicker than he came."

"Well, that beats me," said John. "Haven't they any spirit of revolt?"

"They're extraordinarily patient," said his guide. "Most of the elder men were in the war. They're still loyal to Crown and country."

As an American John didn't think much of this loyalty to the Crown. He could understand loyalty to the personal leadership of young King Edward, but that was because he was a good scout. There was something mystical about the Crown and all this worship of the Royal Family. He couldn't follow it.

Nor could he follow very clearly events which suddenly broke upon England and led to ten days of tremendous drama, shaking the whole country with tremendous emotion.

It was the crisis over Mrs. Simpson and the King.

For months the American Press had been filled with stories on this subject. It had been the one burning topic of conversation at American dinner-tables. The journalistic tribe had concentrated on this story, getting what news they could

from the friends of Mrs. Simpson—bribing servants, taking secret snapshots, and making up the rest out of their fertile and audacious imaginations. They told fantastic stories of Mrs. Simpson's life. They published intimate conversations between King Edward and his mother which no one could have overheard, even with his ear to a keyhole in Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle. But they were certain of the main fact. King Edward had made up his mind to marry "Wallie Simpson".

England had shut down on the story. There had been a secret and self-imposed censorship among all the newspapers. There were still millions of people in England who had never heard of Mrs. Simpson—even at dinner-tables to which John was invited. Or if they had heard of her, any reference to this subject was taboo in front of the servants. Now the storm broke, and the shock seemed to be greater because of previous ignorance.

A Yorkshire paper broke the newspaper censorship, taking as its excuse some indiscreet remarks by a bishop who criticized the King's social life. Other newspapers followed the trail, reprinting all the gossip which had been circulated in the American Press. The Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to be taking a hand in it because of the impending Coronation. Mr. Baldwin, who was a sick man, it was said, left Downing Street several times for long audiences with the King, who remained shut up in his country house at Fort Belvedere, near Virginia Water. There was a constant coming and going between that house and London. The King's brothers were busy on the roads at many hours of the day and night. Officials of the Duchy of Cornwall, from which the King derived some of his revenue, were in constant attendance. Members of the King's staff were getting no sleep these nights and travelling to and fro with despatch-cases, dogged by journalists in motor-cars, among whom was John Barton of the *New York Observer*.

The English papers left their readers bewildered. Some

maintained that the King could not marry without consent of Parliament. Others asserted that the King was perfectly free to marry any woman he liked without consulting his Ministers. Where, then, was the constitutional crisis? And, from the point of view of an American journalist, what was all the fuss about, anyway? Why shouldn't the King marry Mrs. Simpson as soon as she obtained a divorce from her husband? Every photograph showed that she had good looks. Everybody who had met her insisted that she was a charming and witty woman. Hadn't the King, as Prince of Wales, earned the right to marry any lady upon whom his heart was set? Hadn't he done fine service for his people and Empire? Hadn't he gone through the World War as a youngster? Hadn't he sacrificed himself to all the boredom and ceremonial of public duties as Prince and as King, a lonely soul in that position? Hadn't he the right to a wife like any of his subjects?

These were some of the questions which John Barton put to some of his friends, who provided no answers convincing to an American mind. He put them to an unexpected visitor who came to his rooms one afternoon during this crisis. It was a December day, and he had stacked up his coal fire in the flat at Burton Court. Outside it was pouring with rain, in which he had been sloshing about for hours, talking to people in the streets and shops, and to taxi-drivers and mechanics and hall porters, and old Chelsea pensioners, now in their winter blue coats. He was in quest of that mysterious and elusive thing called Public Opinion. Then he had settled down to write a despatch on this subject for the *New York Observer*, trying to get the right balance between conflicting opinions, which on the whole were unfriendly to the American marriage, though utterly bewildered and perturbed.

His typewriter was slashing out the last words when he was interrupted by Mrs. Pockett, who came in with an announcement:

"There's a lidy to see you. She won't keep you, she says."

"What's she like?" asked John, folding up his typescript and putting it into an envelope to await a messenger boy, already on his way from the office.

"A real lidy. Not one of them minxes. It's Lady Anne."

Mrs. Pockett gave a wheezy laugh.

John strode into the hall and was astonished to find Lady Anne Ede in a little blue hat dripping water and a wet raincoat above her short frock.

"This is great!" exclaimed John. "You're just in time for tea."

Anne Ede looked as though she had come for something more important than tea.

"I can only stay a few minutes," she said, as he bent over her hand. "The fact is I'm frightfully worried. I thought you might know something."

John helped her off with her raincoat and laughed at her last words.

"At Harvard I thought I knew something about almost everything. Now I'm not so certain."

She waited until they were in his room, with the door shut against Mrs. Pockett, who showed a disposition to linger.

"Do sit down," said John. "It's swell having you here."

Instead of sitting down she just leaned against the edge of his table.

"Do you know anything about this Simpson affair?" she asked. "You journalists seem to have secret sources of information."

John smiled at this simple faith in his profession.

"Oh!" he said. "I thought you had come for a pleasant fireside talk, out of the rain and the wind. Must we get on to that topic? Isn't it becoming rather a bore?"

"What's going to happen?" asked Anne. "What do you know?"

John laughed and pleaded ignorance.

"I haven't the key to the back door of Fort Belvedere. I only know the latest whispers of Dame Rumour—that lying jade."

"What are the whispers?" asked Anne anxiously.

"They say your King has dug his heels in. They say old man Baldwin can't persuade him to give up the lady. Why should he, anyway? He's King, isn't he?"

"That's why he should," answered Anne emotionally. "He's dedicated to England. England comes first."

"Well, now," said John good-humouredly, "you know so much more about it than I do. But I can't see how this proposed marriage will make any difference to England. Everything will go on just the same, won't it? The same rain will fall on English pavements."

"You don't understand," said Anne. "You're an American. You don't know our English traditions—all that the Crown means to us."

"Tell me about them," said John, "while we have some tea. I'm a good listener, especially when I've something charming to look at."

Mrs. Pockett came in with the tea-tray at that precise moment.

"A nice cup of tea will do you both good," she said. "I always think it tastes best on a day like this when it's raining cats and dogs outside the winders."

"I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Pockett," said John. "You're a very wise woman. You're my guardian angel."

Mrs. Pockett giggled and gave him a little push on the shoulder as she passed.

"Go on with you! I look as much like a guardian angel as the tabby-cat downstairs."

"A wonderful type," remarked John, when she had retired to her own place. "England will be all right so long as it has women like Mrs. Pockett."

He was glad to see that Anne did not refuse to drink the

tea he poured out for her. He was rather hoping she would drop this subject of controversy in which he failed to see eye to eye with her. She looked very beautiful in his arm-chair. He hoped she would stay quite a long time.

"John," she said presently, "I came here on a special mission. I had a brain-wave. I want you to do something for me. I want you to do something for England."

John poured some more water into the teapot and thought this out for a minute.

"That sounds good," he said. "It makes me feel very important. If I could do anything for you, including England, I'd like to do it, believe me."

"It's a great idea," said Anne. "It came to me as a hunch when I was walking down Bond Street. I suddenly thought of you."

"That makes me feel good," said John. "I expect it was just about the time when I was thinking of you."

"It was twenty minutes ago," said Anne.

"To the very tick of the clock!" exclaimed John, who twenty minutes ago had been utterly engrossed in his article. "I had a sudden vision of you. I thought I'd give a million dollars if Lady Anne would come to tea this afternoon."

Anne fluttered her eyelashes for a moment, and for the first time a smile touched her lips.

"Well, here I am," she said. "And I am going to ask you to do something for me. It's the first time I've asked, isn't it?"

"I hope it won't be the last," said John earnestly. "May I enquire what small service I can do, by any chance?"

Anne leaned forward and lowered her voice.

"I want you to go to Mrs. Simpson. I want you to ask her, on behalf of England, to go back to the United States."

John laughed loudly. This girl was asking him to do something entirely ridiculous and impossible.

Anne put her hand across the table and held his for a moment, which he thought very pleasant indeed.

"I'm quite serious," she said. "You can put it quite nicely, of course. Ask her to give up the King. Tell her that he belongs to England. Tell her that if she would make this sacrifice it would be the best proof of love, and would give her a golden crown in Heaven."

John laughed again uneasily. Lady Anne Ede was surely kidding him, he thought.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "I haven't the honour of knowing Mrs. Simpson. She's guarded by policemen with large feet and truncheons. No one can get near her. In any case——"

"In any case what?" asked Anne, very coldly, disappointed at this reception of her brain-wave.

"In any case what's the matter with Mrs. Simpson? Is it because she's an American that you don't like her?"

"You've got it all wrong," cried Anne. "It's not that at all. It's for quite different reasons."

"Tell me," said John.

Anne gave the reasons why in her very English mind she thought it would be out of the question for Mrs. Simpson to marry the King. They were all the reasons which John had heard before, and which had failed to convince him. They seemed to him to be based entirely on caste, and mediaeval ideas; utterly out of touch with modern ways of thought and the democratic spirit. He had heard them at many dinner-tables. It was the old narrow Puritanism of England coming out of its hiding-places, challenging the modern spirit and its freedom from ecclesiastical intolerance. Now this girl, who attracted him very much because of her charm and style, had come on this preposterous mission. She belonged to the old aristocracy of England. She had been brought up in traditions which seemed to him foolishly out of date. What could he do about that?

"Then you won't help?" said Anne, getting up and going towards her wet little hat.

"I'd like to help," said John. "I'd walk a thousand leagues

to fetch you a red, red rose. But this is outside my reach. Anyhow, I expect it's a storm in a teacup. I'll be sorry if your King can't marry the woman he loves, but I have an idea that he'll get over it. There are other daughters of Eve who would be glad to solace him."

Anne Ede shook her head.

"It's gone too far for that," she said in a tragic voice. "My father has heard something too appalling. They're beginning to talk about it."

"What's that?" asked John curiously.

She spoke one word in a voice hardly above a whisper: "Abdication."

John raised his eyebrows. Anne Ede was telling him something which would create a world-wide sensation if he sent it over the wires. The *New York Observer* would carry headlines across its front page. It would be a "scoop" of the first magnitude if he dared to take a chance on it. No one had got as far as that yet.

"Do you think there's anything in it?" he asked. "Where did your father get it from? Who are the people talking about it?"

She looked into his eyes with a sudden fear in hers.

"You won't repeat it? My father's name mustn't be mentioned. Oh, you won't give me away, will you?"

John answered her quietly.

"That's all right."

She held out her hand to him.

"Honour bright?"

"As bright as burnished gold," he assured her. "I'm a bad journalist, but a good friend, believe me."

She believed him, as he knew by the way she held out her hand to him and left it in his.

"I've been talking like an idiot," she confessed. "We're all talking like idiots. We don't know what's going to happen, and some of us are getting rather bothered."

That was true. John Barton, this observer of English life,

became aware during the next few days that England was getting bothered and that the strain on its nerves was very great. Talking to people of all classes with whom he could get in touch in casual conversation, he found a sense of bewilderment and a conflict of loyalties. For the first time he drew a little close to these people among whom he had come as a stranger. In this time of crisis surrounding the Crown some of them took off their masks and revealed themselves. The old Puritan instinct seemed to be stirring among the working folk. They were against divorce, it seemed, especially in high places. The Nonconformist conscience surged up, and it was not hypocrisy in the style of Mr. Stiggins, but something deep and sincere in simple minds. John was astonished at the reverence of caste and the mystical glamour of the Crown which he found among mechanics and labourers and unemployed men. He went down to the London docks, where he had heard there was a rough revolutionary element, but talking to these dockers he found a kind of rigid belief that the Royal Family had to give a lead to the nation in all social conventions. They were against Mrs. Simpson's marriage to the King. They had nothing against her personally and didn't believe half the stuff printed in the papers, but they had made up their minds that she wasn't quite the right kind of dame to sit in Buckingham Palace.

"I can't see our Duchesses bobbing to her," said one rough fellow with a three days' beard who spoke as though he were on familiar terms with the aforesaid Duchesses.

"And they call this democracy," said John to himself as he took a bus to Aldgate. "I'm getting back to feudal England. It doesn't seem to have changed since William the Conqueror."

His American mind was jolted by this discovery of instinctive allegiance to the tradition of kingship and by this adoration of the Royal Family by men and women, especially women, living in the squalor of mean streets. Hadn't they any spirit of revolt against their own social conditions?

Hadn't they any envy of those who had all the privileges of life? What did they get, he wondered, out of royal pomp and pageantry except entrenchment in their own low status of the feudal scale—serfs, or at the best the ill-paid hands of Big Business, which gained its security from the Crown? On the religious issues raised by this marriage question he found a variety of opinions in higher social grades, but the lower down he went into the social scale in his search for public opinion the more he found a personal devotion to the man who had won their hearts as Prince of Wales conflicting with this disapproval of the American marriage. The only criticism he heard against the King himself was at London dinner-tables and in London clubs. Some of it was harsh and, to his American mind, cruel.

"This thing is boiling up into passionate conflict," he said to Bryan Feversham, whom he went to see one morning for any "dope" that friend of his might have. "Do you think it's likely to lead to a revolution—Royalists and Roundheads, or Simpsonites and anti-Simpsonites?"

Bryan Feversham found this question highly amusing.

"My dear John," he said. "If you knew these people as well as I do you wouldn't let such an idea enter your head."

"Haven't they any guts?" asked John. "Are they going to let their Prince give up his lady-love because an old Archbishop and a pug-faced gentleman called Baldwin say him nay? Isn't there a King's Party already gathering for action?"

Bryan Feversham told him to think again.

He was thinking quite a lot, and not sleeping much. Five times he motored down to Fort Belvedere, from which a little news and a lot of rumour leaked through the guarded gates. He walked out late into the London streets, talking with groups of men and women discussing this affair on their doorsteps. He stood outside Buckingham Palace, where a crowd always waited, though no Royal Standard hung on the flagstaff.

The historical side of this drama gripped him. It was Shakespearean, he thought, his mind going back to Prince Hal. That young Prince of Wales had offended his people, or at least his father's Court, by being too free with boon companions in the taverns. Afterwards he had been the hero of Agincourt. This Edward might be the leader of his nation's youth in another war. He had a personal magnetism in which he put a spell on the youth of the world. John Barton, this stranger in England, knew a girl in New York who had danced with him once and had gone crazy about him. One of his photographs in naval cap with his boyish grin hung above the desks of thousands of stenographers with those of their favourite film stars. He seemed to stand for youth and sport and gallantry and romance. He was the Prince Charming of a modern fairy-tale, whatever stories might be told about him by the social gossipmongers.

John Barton passed the old brown bricks of St. James's Palace and watched the red-coated sentries passing up and down with those three convulsive jerks at the end of each turn. It was nearly midnight, and the old building loomed dark against the sky, where white clouds scudded across the moon. Behind those walls the fat Henry had sat with Anne Boleyn. The Merrie Monarch had dallied there with his fair women.

"This old city is ghost-ridden," thought John. "That's the matter with it. The English can't get away from their past."

This social drama of English life appealed to his imagination. He found something of the Shakespearean flavour in the speech of the common folk, and in their humour and character. The types hadn't changed much perhaps, except for different clothes and different accents.

"What do you make of things, buddy?" he asked a thin-faced fellow lighting the fag-end of a cigarette under an archway in the Strand. "Will you break your heart if the King marries Mrs. Simpson?"

The man straightened himself and spat on to the pavement.

"If you weren't a Yank," he said, "I'd punch your jaw for asking silly questions. What do you think I am? The Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"I'm asking you as an ordinary Englishman, old man," said John. "I'm an American newspaper man. I want to find out something about what the English are thinking."

The man laughed hoarsely and then coughed as if he suffered from lung trouble.

"For Gord's sake don't make me laugh," he said.

John slipped half a crown into his hand.

The thin man spoke more civilly.

"It's you newspaper men that makes all the trouble," he said. "But if you want to know my opinion about the King and Mrs. Simpson, it's just this. 'E'll have to give her up.'"

The drama was intensified when Mrs. Simpson gave the slip to all the reporters and Press photographers and then was discovered in France with one of the King's friends as escort. French journalists chased her. She was a hunted thing until she found shelter with her American friends in Cannes, where she sent out a message that her position had become unhappy and untenable and that if it would help to solve the problem she was willing to withdraw forthwith.

"Anne will be pleased," thought John. "It looks as though Wallie is fading out."

"The crisis is over," said some of the newspaper headlines. "Mrs. Simpson withdraws."

This optimism was not shared by some of John's friends—American journalists and English acquaintances.

Mrs. Pockett had something to say on the subject when she brought in the morning eggs and bacon.

"The trouble is, dearie, that the King is a gentleman. Now, my Bill was one of nature's gentlemen and he wouldn't 'ave given me up for all the King's 'orses nor all the King's men. Why, any family opposition would 'ave made 'im see red. It's the same with our King. The more they press 'im, the more 'e stiffens."

"But if the lady withdraws," asked John, who had a great respect for Mrs. Pockett as typical of English opinion in the rough.

Mrs. Pockett put her hands on her bosom, which heaved with emotion.

"Why, dearie, it makes it worse for 'im, poor lad. Does a gentleman fling over 'is sweetheart because 'is family and friends object to 'er style? Why, bless you, it only makes 'im go after 'er. It's wrong tacktics, Mr. Barton, that's what it is. And to think of all the worry the pore dear Queen Mary 'as 'ad. My 'eart bleeds for her."

"Yes, indeed," said John. "The number of hearts bleeding for Queen Mary must be very great."

"I can't think what's going to 'appen," said Mrs. Pockett distressfully.

John was in the same uncertainty. And so was England. Not a soul outside a small circle had the faintest inkling of what was going to happen until the last day of this historic drama, when the newspapers mentioned for the first time the possibility of Abdication.

John Barton read that word thoughtfully with raised eyebrows. Had it come to that then? He might have got a scoop on that if he had been a news-hound and a faithless friend. But even now it was utterly uncertain. Nobody, except Mr. Baldwin and a few others, knew what was going to happen, and they didn't tell.

There was a big crowd outside the Houses of Parliament on the afternoon of December 10th. It was a few minutes after three o'clock. In less than half an hour Mr. Baldwin would be telling the nation how it stood with the King. John studied the faces of the people about him and tried to read their minds and failed. They were all very grave, these English folk, but there was no sign of excitement, no demonstration, no look of passion. They were waiting tensely for the announcement of the King's decision as men wait outside the law courts for a jury's verdict in a great trial. They were

just the type, thought John, that might make up an English jury: middle-aged business men, printers, clerks, craftsmen, and mechanics. Here and there stood a few of the down-and-outs with scarves instead of collars. There were very few women, and John noticed an extra number of police and stalwart men who looked like policemen in plain clothes. The crowds moved about a little uneasily but obeyed the quiet words of the police and kept clear of the gates through which Ministers and members of the House would pass. No one spoke a word in John's neighbourhood. He had never seen a crowd so silent and so still, except at a funeral.

John was standing near the gate leading to the House of Lords. A tall, broad-shouldered figure walked slowly through the lane of people and touched his hat in answer to the policeman's salute. It was Anne Ede's father, the Earl of Stanfield. John was tempted to speak to him and took one step forward, but was pushed back by the policeman, who said, "Stand back there," sternly. Lord Stanfield had the same grave look as the crowd through which he passed.

John showed a white ticket for the Press Gallery in the House of Commons which had been obtained for him by Mr. Speed. He looked down for the first time on the famous Chamber in which so much history had happened, in which there had been so many debates in times of crisis and world chaos. The benches were packed with dark figures, all looking very small from the high gallery. Away in the distance sat the Speaker in his full-bottomed wig, looking very mediaeval. There was a profound silence in the Chamber, disturbed only by the rustle of papers. In the Press Gallery newspaper men were crowded together elbow to elbow. John recognized some of his colleagues. Someone jogged his elbow, and turning his head he recognized an English journalist whom he had met at one of Mr. Speed's little dinner-parties in Cheyne Row.

John whispered to him.

"What do you know?"

"I fear the worst," said his friend.

Presently an elderly man with a square face rose from the Treasury Bench and John recognized him instantly from caricatures by Low and others. It was Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister. He walked to a white line across the floor of the House and bowed to the Speaker and spoke some words in a loud, resonant voice.

"A message from His Majesty the King, signed by His Majesty's own hand."

There was a stir among all those present in the House as though a strong wind had blown across them. John listened to words which could be heard clearly in the silence that followed that movement of bodies.

"After long and anxious consideration I have determined to renounce the Throne to which I succeeded on the death of my father, and I am now communicating this, my final and irrevocable decision."

A whisper reached John's left ear. It was from the man at his side.

"By God. . . . Abdication!"

John listened to the long statement by which King Edward VIII gave up the Crown and named the Duke of York, his brother, as his successor. He listened to the long narrative of Mr. Baldwin, the little square-faced old gentleman so much like his caricatures. He gave his version of the events which had led up to this renunciation, he hesitated and fumbled with his notes and then discarded them. His story seemed incomplete. There was a lot more behind it which he failed to tell. But nothing that he could say could alter the central fact. The British people had lost a King who had seemed to hold the loyalty of his people in a way which few others had done, perhaps. There was another King named George. It was all very odd to an American observer. He couldn't make head or tail of it. Behind it all was the face and figure of an American lady with hair looped over her ears. She had belonged to Baltimore. They called her Wallie Simpson. It was all very

astonishing and very dramatic—one of the greatest romances in modern history.

John slipped away to write his descriptive article for the *New York Observer*. It took him a couple of hours at the office, where some of his colleagues were very excited and harsh in their denunciation of Mr. Baldwin and the Government, and the English people. Only Mr. Speed, that dry old Yankee, refused to be rattled.

"The English people," he said, "will take this very well, I don't doubt. In my judgment Mr. Baldwin handled this affair with considerable courage and tact. He avoided the danger of a King's Party and a conflict of opinion which might have led to a divided people."

John laughed harshly and was astonished at the emotion which made him feel heated about this affair, though he was an American and sceptical of all this king business.

"I can't say I see it that way. Haven't they any guts, these people? I mean can they change their loyalties like a pair of old shoes? They weren't consulted, were they? What about the voice of the people? Didn't Edward have the people behind him and all those fellows in the Air Force and the Services who swore allegiance to him? Are they going to let him go without raising a little finger to keep him? If so, then there's nothing in this king idea except hypocrisy and humbug."

Mr. Speed smiled through his horn-rimmed glasses and pushed a proof over to a messenger boy who was waiting for it.

"John Barton," he said dryly, "you'll know more about England and its people when you've been here a few years longer. And then you'll know how much you don't know. These English folk are pretty wise. They're best when things go badly with them. I've found them steady under fire. If they go wild over what has happened to-day I'll be surprised."

John was unconvinced. That night he went out into the streets again. Surely somewhere in England groups of men were rising. What about the Army and the Air Force?

Weren't there any loyalists? His imagination went back to the time of Charles I, when there had been a bloody civil war. Hadn't these people any passion nowadays? What about that fellow Mosley and his plus-four boys? . . .

It was very silent in the streets that night.

Only a small crowd was shouting outside Buckingham Palace.

They were shouting "God Save the King".

Which King?

A few were shouting "We want King Edward!"

They were moved away by the police.

XIX

ON the night following the Abdication John Barton met Viscount Ede, that good-looking young man who had a garage in Mayfair. He was sauntering through the Green Park with a wire-haired terrier at his heels and recognized John, who was taking a breath of air after late nights and journalistic toil.

"Hullo!" he said good-humouredly. "When are you coming down to Aldermere again?"

John evaded an answer. He had not been asked down to Aldermere again.

"Funny business this change of Kings," said young Ede. "What do you make of it?"

"I can't make anything of it," said John. "I'm an American. We react differently from the English."

Viscount Ede nodded with a faint smile.

"Yes. It must seem very odd. However, it's all gone off very well. No row about it, that's the best thing! The new King is a nice fellow and will do his job very well."

"*Le roi est mort,*" said John. "*Vive le roi!*"

He spoke with a hint of sarcasm, but young Ede agreed without noticing the tone of John's voice.

"Yes, that's how it goes. Our loyalty is to the Crown, not to the individual, unless he has a touch of personal glamour, as Edward undoubtedly had. The new King is a serious fellow, and more in the line of our tradition."

"A puppet?" asked John.

"Oh, Lord, no, not at all! He has lots of character. I

spent a day with him in camp once. The boys adored him, he knew how to talk to them. By the way, Edward is speaking over the wireless to-night. I must admit he has a lot of pluck. I can't think what he will say. Amazing, don't you think?"

A moment later he gave a friendly invitation.

"Why not come to my rooms and listen-in? I have a pretty good instrument."

John hesitated. He had planned to hear the farewell speech of the ex-King at the office, but he was tempted to see the effect of it on English minds. It might give him a clue to that mystery.

"Shouldn't I be in the way?" he asked diffidently.

"Not in the least. I dare say Anne and Betty will drop in. They're very worked-up over all this."

"Maybe they wouldn't like a stranger present," suggested John.

Young Ede didn't seem to think there was anything in that.

"Oh, I don't see why. You're a friend of the family, aren't you? Besides, we don't look upon Americans as strangers."

John received this remark with a smile. He had heard a certain amount of criticism of Americans from this man's sister.

"See you later, then."

Young Ede strolled off with a whistle to the wire-haired terrier.

"Extraordinary people!" thought John. "Here's one of the English aristocracy who talks about the Abdication as though it were of no more account than a Punch and Judy show."

Viscount Ede, son of the Earl of Stanfield, hadn't turned a hair. Perhaps he wouldn't turn a hair if two thousand aeroplanes came over London on a bombing expedition. Perhaps he would look up at the sky and say with his English drawl: "Flying pretty high, aren't they? Sure to make a nasty mess!" Was it all a pose? Good form and all that? Or was there a

complete lack of emotion and passion behind that good-looking mask with its little fair moustache?

"It all went off very well"!

John laughed aloud in St. James's Park at this summing-up of an event in English history which had excited the whole American people and made them drunk with emotion.

Perhaps after all it was foolish of him to go to Ede's rooms for that radio speech by the man who had been King. Anne and Betty were there with that fellow Robert Bramley, who had made friends with Judy. Anne, thought John, was looking pale and grave and did not seem enthusiastic in her greeting of him, though she held out her hand to him and said, "Hullo, John Barton.

"It's not going to be funny," she added, alluding to the coming speech.

"Extremely painful, I should say," he answered.

"I don't think I can bear to listen to it," said Betty Bramley. "I shall howl my eyes out."

Robert Bramley, that humorist, desisted from any attempt at comedy.

He gave a kind of groan and spoke seriously.

"I'm sorry I came. I don't like listening to a man before he commits suicide. Frank, old boy, give me a drink."

Viscount Ede poured out a whisky and handed it to him.

"Why all this emotion?" he asked. "Everything's all right, it seems to me."

He looked at his wrist-watch and went over to a box in the corner of his room and turned on a switch.

A voice said:

"His Royal Highness Prince Edward speaking from Windsor Castle."

John Barton listened to the thin, clear voice of the ex-King Edward, and as he listened to the most astonishing speech in English history—surely it was that?—he was stirred by an emotion beyond all intellectual control. "By God!" he thought—being an American—"if I had been an Englishman I should

have followed that King to the death. He's a human fellow. He's a good scout."

Suddenly Betty burst into tears and rushed out of the room.

Anne Ede had restless fingers. She kept twisting a little fold in her silk frock. She was extremely pale and kept her eyes down.

"And now," said the voice presently, "we all have a new King. I wish him and you, his people, happiness and prosperity, with all my heart. God bless you all! God Save The King!"

Anne Ede stood up and went to the mantelpiece and touched some ornament on it. Viscount Ede took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on a finger-nail before lighting it. Robert Bramley sat with his elbows on his knees and his face cupped in his hands.

Suddenly Anne turned and spoke wildly.

"It was all the fault of you Americans," she said harshly.

John stood silent under this attack, though his face flushed. He could see that the girl was overstrained by emotion.

"Quite unfair, Anne!" said her brother. "You're talking nonsense."

"I know," cried Anne. "I want to be unfair. I want to be hellish to somebody."

Suddenly, like Betty, she wept and went out of the room.

"I'm sorry about that!" said young Ede apologetically. "Anne generally keeps her head on her shoulders. Have a drink, Barton?"

But John Barton took his leave with thanks. He felt distressed.

XX

Now that Judy had gone John had to make his own social arrangements at times when he was free from journalistic work. That was not difficult, he found, now that he had made a variety of contacts in London. As a single man he found himself invited to many dinner-tables and to many rooms where he no longer felt ill at ease in English company. The first strangeness due to differences between English and American life was beginning to wear off. The English accent no longer surprised or amused him. His ears became attuned to it. There were times when he no longer regarded himself as a foreigner among these people, and when these friends of his did not seem conscious of any alien among them and assumed that there was no difference of manner or mind between them. That, in a way, was an illusion, and to some extent a cause of annoyance now and again, when he was jerked back to a national sensitiveness by careless remarks about America and Americans, generally critical, which he felt bound to resent, or by comments which revealed an abysmal ignorance of American life and politics. He was training himself, however, to accept such annoyances without taking them too seriously.

His friends in Bloomsbury and Maida Vale, the Left Wing Intelligenzia, talked such a lot of ill-digested thought about almost everything that it was absurd, he found, to be grim if they directed their conversation to the American point of view. They exaggerated every thesis. They allowed their imagination free play without restricting it by such limitations

as strict attention to fact. If facts got into the way of their arguments it was so much the worse for the facts. Russian Communism was still, they thought, the most beautiful ideal of humanity, and when John ventured to remind them that Soviet Russia had become a bureaucratic State with many class distinctions and inequalities of status they just didn't believe it and called him a "reactionary" who sinned against the light. They included Russia among the democracies who one day would have to make a stand against the dictators and knock hell out of Hitler and Mussolini, forgetting, and indeed denying, that Stalin was the most ruthless dictator in the world to-day. John argued with them, laughed at their conversational extravagances, found them astonishingly like the same set in Greenwich Village, New York, though not so prone to throw parties in which conversation was apt to be drowned in drink. They were more abstemious and went to bed at more reasonable hours. Among them were men who had more experience of life and service in many parts of the world and had gone deep into the problems of European conflict by intimate knowledge of its countries and peoples.

There was one man outside these groups with whom John had established a quiet and steady friendship. It was Peter Langdon, the novelist, whom he had first met aboard the *Queen Mary*. He lived with his wife in a small house not far from Burton Court, and it was on the Embankment, a quarter of a mile away from his own rooms, that John had met him again and resumed the acquaintance begun on the Atlantic.

That was one evening when John was walking briskly for the sake of exercise and fresh air. There was a south-west wind blowing, making crisp little waves on the muddy water of the old river, while dark clouds were scurrying across a grey sky through which there was an occasional glint of pallid sunshine. John was struck with the figure of a man leaning with his elbows on the parapet of the Embankment. There was something familiar about his attitude and profile. He had stood like that, leaning on the rail of the *Queen Mary*,

one night when he had talked about world chaos and the martyrdom of man. John hesitated to interrupt his reverie, and then took a chance on it and spoke his name.

"Why, yes," said Langdon, after John had reintroduced himself. "Of course I remember you perfectly. We had some pleasant talks together. But I have a frightful memory for names."

"John Barton," said the owner of that name.

"Good heavens, yes!" exclaimed Langdon. "How foolish of me! And you had a sister named Judy with laughing eyes and a charming face. I've often thought of you both."

He was the same shy man, somewhat embarrassed by this meeting and a little hesitating in his manner. But after a few remarks about the weather, with which all Englishmen begin a conversation as a neutral topic unlikely to lead to any consequence of argument or action, he gave an unexpected invitation.

"Why not come in and have a glass of sherry with me? My wife would be glad to meet you. I live quite close here."

He lived in a little old house in a row of little old houses called St. Leonard's Terrace, looking on to the open field of Burton Court, where nursemaids brought their children to play in the dank mists of an English February; where soldiers from Chelsea Barracks played football in the afternoons, and where the young women of the immediate neighbourhood gave their dogs a little exercise.

Langdon's house had a small front garden with crazy paving and a sundial, upon which no sun had cast its shadow for many weeks. Inside it was very quaint and pleasing, with panelled walls and a narrow staircase leading upstairs to a drawing-room with old furniture which had the lovely patina of age.

Standing in this room, or in the booklined study upstairs, Langdon seemed to be remote from all vulgarity of modern life. His high forehead and sensitive face—the face of a man who had suffered from secret adventures of the soul—had the

look of a scholar and a thinker, and his quiet simplicity of manner and speech, with that shyness which hardly ever left him, had a certain dignity which lifted him above the commonplace.

"That man," thought John, listening to him on many evenings, "is outside the ordinary traffic of the herd. He's a looker-on at life without partisanship or political prejudice. He's like a disembodied spirit looking at the wickednesses and the weaknesses of mankind with pity and understanding. Perhaps it makes him ineffective and passionless."

He was almost a complete pacifist, John found, not able to follow him along that line of argument, and it was Mrs. Langdon who gave the clue to this side of his character.

"Peter," she said once, when John found her alone one afternoon, "went through the war as a gunner. You couldn't imagine him in khaki, could you? It seems too absurd."

She laughed at this very great absurdity, for it was certainly impossible, as she said, to visualize this delicate-looking man in the mud and filth of war with a steel helmet over that high brow.

"He suffered a million agonies," she added. "So many of his friends were killed. He bled at the heart for all that massacre of young men, and of course our separation for four and a half years was a torture to him. No wonder he is getting anxious about the state of Europe and the awful prospect that another war is coming, as so many seem to think. If it really happens he will die of despair before it has gone on for two weeks. He simply can't believe that such a repetition of horror could be allowed by the world."

Mrs. Langdon was middle-aged, but had not lost all the beauty of young womanhood. At least she had kept the complexion of a rose, and the light that shone from her dark Irish eyes with their long lashes, and a grace of figure and movement which hardly made possible the fact that she had a son of twenty or so who was up at Oxford. John was startled one day by the appearance of that young man, who

came quickly into the drawing-room and kissed his mother on the cheek. He had her Irish eyes, and his father's finely cut features, and a fine athletic figure. John had a long talk with him and found him intelligent and unaffected.

"That's one reason why Peter is a pacifist," said Mrs. Langdon, when her son had left the room. "Paul would be touched on the shoulder by a sergeant-major on the first day of war if it happened in a year or two."

"Do you think it will?" asked John.

She looked at him with fear in her eyes.

"I'm afraid of that man Hitler," she answered. "I see pictures of all those boys in Germany drilling and marching under the sign of the swastika. What does it mean? Why are they building aeroplanes at such a speed? I have a sister in Germany married to a German ex-officer. What she writes to me sometimes terrifies me, although I have to read between the lines."

She broke off suddenly, as though she did not like that line of thought.

"I never speak of these things to Peter," she said. "They worry him too much, and he doesn't sleep at night if he's worried."

John found himself at home in the Langdons' house. Gradually they made him free of it, and were always pleased when he called at any odd hour, even as late as ten o'clock at night after a hard day's work. In this little old house of the eighteenth century he felt less of an exile. Katherine Langdon mothered him a little in a very gracious way, and yet was young enough to attract him by her beauty, as it seemed to him. He liked the house in St. Leonard's Terrace better than the cocktail bars or night clubs to which he went sometimes with Bryan Feversham and his social set, who called each other by their Christian names and made a lot of noise.

XXI

JOHN had been hurt by Anne Ede's behaviour on the night of Abdication and it rankled in him from time to time. He was aware uneasily that this girl attracted him more than any he had encountered in life's journey so far, apart from Diana Feversham, who was on the other side of the Atlantic and becoming rather remote in his mind. Anne exasperated him, but she had character and undeniable intelligence. She could also at times be extremely charming, and she had been so sufficiently to weaken his antipathy to a very dangerous extent now and then. She stood between him and his work at times. He found himself thinking of her when he ought to have been writing a "piece" for the *New York Observer*. He found himself walking in places where he thought he might meet her—up and down Bond Street, along the rails in Hyde Park, where he looked for her among the riders, and in Belgrave Place, where her father had his town house.

As it happened, he met her in a street far from London. It was a very broad and handsome street called Vittorio Veneto, in the city of Rome, to which he had been sent to do a story by his chief, Mr. Franklin Speed. Arrangements were being made through the American Embassy to procure him an interview with Mussolini, whom he regarded as one of the world's bandits. He was better pleased to have an interview with Anne, whom he had lost for some time.

This meeting took place a week after he had been in Rome, where he stayed at the Albergo Flora, near the Pincio Gardens. It was a week in which he had been startled and

moved by the strength of his first impressions in the Eternal City. Its beauty and magnificence on a day of early spring had put a spell upon him. It was no mean city which he saw when he stood on the terrace of the Pincio Gardens looking across to the old hills whose names were written in the history books. Every stone down there below him bled with history, Christian or pagan. Down the Appian Way out there had passed the whole pageant of civilization in the Roman world. Along these roads had passed its legions on their way to Gaul, to the depths of old German forests, or eastwards to the limits of the known world. He had stood in the Colisseum listening to the patter of an Italian guide who spoke with an American accent. The guide lost his attention, and his imagination drifted back through the centuries to the days when Nero had sat in the Imperial box here, looking down upon his gladiators and their wild beasts, before the *pièce de résistance*, when the Christians would come out of those dungeons to their doom. He touched old stones along the Via d'Impero and in their vibrations established contact with the age of Augustus Caesar, and the great Julius, and Trajan, and other ghosts who came to him from remembered scraps of reading when he had been a Harvard man, with one leg flung across an arm-chair and a box of "Camels" at his elbow. What a fool he had been not to delve deeper into the annals of the past! How pitiable were his odds and pieces of historical knowledge! Now that he stood here in the ruins laid bare by Mussolini he wished he were more of a scholar so that he could re-create in his mind the scenes and characters of those past ages when these columns were first raised to the glory of the gods or the pride of the Caesars.

It was when he was returning from the Baths of Caracalla, where he had a vision of social life 2000 years ago—rather better in some ways than life in New York—that he saw on the broad pathway of Vittorio Veneto in the shadow of a high wall with trailing plants the figure of Anne Ede, looking very modern. She was in a white frock with a little green

hat and walking with the swing of an English girl past a group of Italians waiting to cross the street. If he had met Calphurnia, the wife of Caesar, he would not have been more surprised.

"Hullo, Anne!" he said, raising his hat.

She had been glancing at the Italians with a smile, because one of the young men was kissing a girl with his arm round her waist, to the amusement of his friends. At this greeting she turned her head quickly and then laughed at this encounter.

"John Barton? Good heavens! What are you doing in Rome? I thought you were describing the strange habits of the English to the great American public."

"You were very unkind to me the last time we met," John reminded her. "I thought I should never see you again. I came here to heal a broken heart."

"Was I rude or anything like that?" asked Anne, as though trying to remember their last meeting.

"Well, I wouldn't say rude exactly," answered John, smiling down at her and thinking how wonderful she looked in the shadow of a Roman wall. "But you said it was all my fault that Edward renounced his Crown. I thought that was a trifle rough."

"Could I have said anything so utterly absurd? I must have been very worked up. Let's go and sit somewhere. I've been walking for miles—the whole length of the Via del Tritone."

John snapped his fingers at a passing taxi and suggested the Casina delle Rose in the Pincio Gardens.

"Quite a pleasant spot," he assured her.

She knew it perfectly, and gave the direction to the driver in what sounded to John like very good Italian.

"Do you speak this lingo?" he asked. "That's wonderful."

She spoke Italian fairly well, having been in Italy several times, and once for six months with her family when they had taken a villa at Fiesole.

"I call this good," said John, when he sat with her at a

tin-topped table in the *al fresco* café-restaurant. "And they say miracles don't happen nowadays."

"What miracle?" asked Anne, who had just ordered two *capuccini* from a young waiter who greeted her as though he had seen her before and was glad to see her again.

"Meeting you!" explained John. "Finding you under an Italian sky a long way from London."

He glanced around him at the scene. He wanted to memorize it. This was a good moment in life. It was a good scene. This outdoor restaurant was a resort of smart Society in Rome who came for twelve o'clock coffee or aperitifs as an excuse for sitting in the sunshine and meeting their friends. Motor-cars drove up to the garden entrance and deposited Italian ladies with their lap-dogs, or young mothers with their children looking like Raphael's cherubs. Young men, smartly dressed like most Italians—in spite of an economic crisis which was supposed to be plunging Italy into blue ruin after the Abyssinian adventure—sat at the tables with young women who were elegant if not beautiful, and seemed to have no work to do on a week-day morning. Outside the garden there was a cavalcade of well-groomed horses, and once some of the people rose from their chairs to gaze at one horseman who passed at a canter. There were murmurs of "*Il Duce!*" At the entrance to the restaurant a string orchestra was playing light music.

"How's Judy?" asked Anne. "When's she coming back?"

John could not answer the second question.

Judy was quite well but worried about her father's health, which was not too good.

"Robin was very gone on her," said Anne. "I thought they were going to make a go of it. But of course it was impossible really."

"Why?" asked John. "Anything wrong with Robin?"

"He hasn't a bean. That's why Vera preferred a dull husband with a good bank account to romantic squalor in Robin's slum. Poor old Robin! It knocked him edgewise

when she chucked him. He simply adored her, and of course she had led him up the garden path like the little cat she is."

"Who's Vera?" asked John. "She doesn't sound nice."

"She's not," said Anne firmly. "But she hasn't done badly for herself. She's the Countess of Munstead. She was on the *Queen Mary*. Don't you remember, she came to lunch that day at Aldermere and Robin was very cold to her, although she wanted to make eyes at him again? It was rather amusing."

John remembered the lady. He had been struck by her appearance and personality. She had worn astonishing frocks in the dining-rooms of the *Queen Mary*, with less to them than was generally demanded. The Pilgrim Fathers would have had something to say about her.

But he was not much interested now in the Countess of Munstead. He was more interested in the renewal of friendship with Anne Ede.

"I suppose you're in Rome to see your brother David?" he asked.

"Quite a good guess! David, poor darling, is in the throes of a love-affair which is likely to ruin his career. The Diplomatic Service doesn't encourage anything in the nature of a scandal."

John remembered there had been some talk of that during the week-end at Aldermere.

"A little Italian countess," he said. "The wife of one of Mussolini's generals."

Anne looked round for a moment rather nervously.

"In Rome," she said, "we don't mention that gentleman's name. We call him Mr. Smith. It's safer."

"I'll make a mental note of it," said John. "How does your brother welcome your attempts at rescue?"

Anne put a finger to her lips.

"Mum's the word," she said hurriedly. "He's quite unaware of any ulterior motive on my part."

"It strikes me you have a very delicate diplomatic mission," said John.

They talked of other things for half an hour, which seemed like two minutes, until Anne glanced at a tiny wrist-watch.

"I shall have to go. I'm lunching at the Embassy."

"Now, that's what I call too bad," exclaimed John with deep disappointment. "I wanted you to lunch with me. There's a fine restaurant I've discovered called the Ulpia. It's as old as Trajan's Forum and gives one a pleasant idea of banqueting with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony."

"How gruesome!" laughed Anne.

She couldn't lunch with him, but she offered to dine with him one evening if she could bring David with her. Anything to get David out of the clutches of his little vamp.

"What about bringing the vamp?" asked John. "She might fall for me and relax her grip on a more innocent male. That sounds like egotism, but it's really self-sacrifice."

"Now, that's an idea!" cried Anne. "That's really a brain-wave."

John laughed, but felt a little vexed with himself for making the suggestion. He had no desire whatever to meet the wife of one of Mussolini's generals. He would have preferred to dine alone with Anne. First she had thrust her brother on him. Now she was including an Italian countess.

He hired another taxi for her and took her to the British Embassy in the Via Venti Settembre, near Porta Pia.

"It's nice meeting you again," she said before she rang the bell. "I'm sorry I was rude the last time we met. Forgive me, won't you?"

"Forget that!" said John. "But I'll be vexed if I don't see something of you in Rome."

"You will!" she promised. "I'll send a note about the Ulpia."

She raised a friendly hand to him as the door of the Embassy was opened by a man in livery.

XXII

THROUGH a young man in the American Embassy, to whom he carried an introduction from Bryan Feversham, John met some interesting people and had certain doors opened to him in Rome. He dined one evening with a group of these new friends at a restaurant near the Piazza del Popolo. At his table, in a room crowded with Italians, was his host, Johnson Clarke, who had the soft accent of Georgia. He was next to a thin, elderly, hatchet-faced Englishman named Henry Merivale. On John's side of the table was an Italian journalist named Boldini with his wife Lucia—a dark lady with black hair looped over her ears. They were joined presently by another Italian lady named the Contessa Massaccio.

"All this is very amusing," thought John as he glanced round at this company. "It's more romantic than a milk-bar in Boston."

He was amused at this contrast between his former and present experience of life, and for a moment or two he was stricken by an inferiority complex, which did not often afflict him and was quite unnecessary.

"These people," he thought, "are ultra-sophisticated. I'm just a crude fellow from the West. They belong to the old civilization, except Jimmy Clarke of Georgia, who has taken on the veneer of Europe. I expect these diplomatic laddies know all the moves on the European chessboard and all the low-down behind the scenes. That Italian countess looks as though she had stepped out of a story by Boccaccio."

The Italian countess sat next to him, and seemed to like the look of him. She had dark and liquid eyes, and a skin like old ivory, and scarlet lips. Fortunately she spoke fluent English, which she had learnt in London, where her father was Italian Ambassador.

"I love Americans," she told him presently. "I adore them."

"I'm an American," said John. "That makes me feel good, Countess."

"It is because you are an American," said the lady, "that I say what I say. I would not tell that to an Italian or a Frenchman."

"Why do you love Americans so much?" enquired John politely.

She told him why at some length. She loved Americans because, she said, they were so simple and uncomplicated, so much like children. They saw things, she said, in black and white, with never any half-tones. That was wonderful, and of course all wrong, because life had no blacks and whites, but only an infinite gradation of tones, merging into each other. The Americans, she thought, made a film scenario of life. They were just like children who wanted their story-books to be filled with good people who were very good and bad people who were very bad. American journalists were like that, she said. They wrote about the European situation as though it were a fairy-tale with ogres and dragons and devils fighting in a deadly warfare against knights in shining armour, *sans peur et sans reproche*. Dictators were all very wicked. On the other side were all the democracies, very virtuous.

"Is it not like that?" she asked after elaborating this thesis in her Italianized English.

John put up a defence for the American point of view. "We have no use for dictatorships and we happen to believe that the democracies stand for human ideals, including liberty and freedom of speech, denied by the other systems."

The Contessa Massaccio laughed into his eyes, turning round to look at him with admiration while she stubbed out her cigarette.

"You are adorable!" she cried. "You are so very American! You are like a great big baby boy!"

"That's how I feel," said John, refusing to take offence. "It's a nice feeling."

"Now let us talk a little about this foolish subject, dictatorships and democracies," said the Contessa. "It is the cause of many misunderstandings. It will one day lead to another world war, which is not very far away."

She talked for some little time about that subject. As far as John could understand her, she thought that there was no such thing as democracy. It was an idea. It was an illusion. It was impossible that any people should govern themselves, because most people were entirely ignorant, and most people were entirely foolish.

"How could a country be ruled by its lowest intelligence?" she asked. "It is idiotic! It is not done, even in the United States, where your Mr. Roosevelt pretends to the people that they rule themselves while he is deciding their foreign policy and demanding their dollars for purposes of which they disapprove."

John answered with a trump card.

"We can turn him out when the people have had enough of him. That's the safeguard of democracy. You can't turn out Mussolini without killing him. That's his risk and handicap."

The Contessa Massaccio glanced over her white shoulder and then put her hand on John's arm.

"Big American baby," she said, "I implore you not to talk like that in a public place. It's very dangerous. It's the way to an Italian prison. There is a gentleman in Rome called Smeet."

John understood that there was a gentleman in Rome called Mr. Smith. Anne had mentioned the fact.

Lucia Boldini, the wife of the Italian journalist, was talking to Johnson Clarke of the American Embassy.

"It is amusing to Italians," she said, "that the Americans are great moralists. They talk of Europe as though we were wicked and depraved people upon whom the good God frowns. We laugh very much at that when we read of your kidnappers—what little baby is safe?—your gunmen, your political corruption, your graft."

"Most of those crimes, dear lady," said Johnson Clarke, "are committed by Italians, Germans and other recent immigrants. And for one criminal there are millions of law-abiding folk. You only hear the worst about us."

"That is true," admitted the lady with the black hair looped over her ears. "Nations know nothing of each other except the bad things. I know that because I am the wife of a journalist. If it were not that I am the wife of a journalist I should pray God to destroy all who write for the newspapers. Then there would be no newspapers. Then there would be a little peace."

"Lucia," exclaimed her husband, smiling across his wine-glass, "you make a mistake, *carissima*. If the journalists of Europe were put in place of the politicians we should make a better world. It is we who understand human nature. It is we who have a certain knowledge of history and geography. When the Peace Treaties of Versailles were made by that group of old gentlemen who sowed the seeds of many wars it would have been well if they had had the journalists to help them. We had been to the different countries. We knew their racial differences. We should have made a reasonable peace."

"I agree," said the thin, hatchet-faced Englishman named Henry Merivale. "At least I will go as far as saying that no body of men would have made a worse kind of peace."

"You see, Lucia!" cried her husband, kissing his glass to her. "Our friend Merivale, who is the wisest man in Rome, and probably in the world, does me the honour to agree with me."

"He is an Englishman," said Lucia Boldini. "I would like to ask him a question which is not too indiscreet."

"I await the question," said Henry Merivale, "but not without anxiety."

He had a thoughtful-looking face which might have been stern but for mild blue eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses.

"Tell me," said Lucia, "how is it that the English make enemies of all those who would be their best friends?"

Henry Merivale laughed and held up his hands as though surrendering.

"That's a nasty one," he admitted with a good-natured smile. "I think you ought to be more kind to me, Lucia, especially when I sent you a bouquet of flowers for your birthday yesterday. But what do you mean exactly by that attack on a defenceless fellow?"

"Is it not true?" asked Lucia. "We Italians loved the English, but you insulted us because we went to war in Abyssinia, copying your many wars of the nineteenth century. You threatened to strangle us by economic sanctions. There is another people who wish to be friends with you. They are the Germans. But you insult them day by day and make ready to go to war with them because they have a leader and a system of government which does not please your Communists and your Socialists. Are you, then, going to fight the only two nations who have some admiration for you? They are the only two nations. The French hate you, but you are allied with them. The Russians hate you, but you are very polite to M. Litvinoff. Everybody else in the world hates you except perhaps the Eskimos."

Henry Merivale laughed quietly and then gave a sigh which was half a groan.

"There is much in what you say, dear lady," he answered. "But as a diplomat my lips are sealed. What a pleasant place this is and how good is this wine of Orvieto! It has a perfect bouquet."

He raised his wine to his lips and then held it up to the light to see its rich colour more clearly.

"There is a charming scandal in Rome," said the journalist Boldini. "Everyone is talking about it. I will mention no names, but it is in connection with a young Englishman who has the face of a mediæval knight and an Italian contessa who is the wife of an Italian general. He will perhaps get into a little trouble, that beautiful English boy. The lady is always with him. He is always with the lady, who has had many other lovers in her time, though he thinks her as innocent as the Little Flower of Jesus. I saw them riding together this morning. A gentleman named Mr. Smith galloped past them and scowled at them."

"Boldini," said Henry Merivale, "you have too much interest in trivial affairs. What does that kind of thing matter to you or me when Europe is sliding towards a new catastrophe?"

"My dear Henry," said Boldini, "it is because the world is in such a horrible condition that I turn my attention to scandals, love-affairs, romances of the heart. I find that a relief to my troubled mind. Boccaccio wrote his delightful stories of love and passion at a time when the plague was very bad in Italy and when the death-carts were piled high with victims. Love is less cruel than what is happening now in Spain. Let us talk of love."

The Contessa by John's side turned to him again and leaned a little towards his shoulder.

"Tell me how Americans love," she pleaded. "Have they any sense of romance, or any passion, or any tenderness with women?"

"Contessa," said John, "I find that an embarrassing question."

"Tell me," said the Contessa. "I have had three lovers. I am not a schoolgirl. Let us talk about love, as Boldini suggests. They tell me that American husbands are the best in the world because they just earn the money to give their wives a good time."

They talked about love, according to the temperament of different races and traditions of civilization, with the effect of climate, art and religion upon that tender passion. The Contessa Massaccio was of opinion that she was quite international in affairs of love, but perhaps would find it difficult to fall in love with a Japanese or a Red Indian.

Presently the conversation drifted to Art, and Boldini admitted that since the coming of Fascism there had been no art in Italy. No music, no painting, no sculpture, no drama appeared from the Fascist State.

"Art," said Boldini, "is dead. That means that the soul of the world has turned away from beauty and the lovely things of the mind. We are, no doubt, drifting back to barbarism, or perhaps developing the robot type of civilization in which men are mere machines."

"I don't believe that," protested Henry Merivale. "Nothing can kill the soul of humanity. This time in which we live is only a temporary retrogression."

Presently this ascetic-looking man, who had a grave face and kindly eyes, turned to John Barton and asked him about conditions in the United States, and seemed interested in John's exposition. He was so interested that when the dinner party broke up he suggested that John might care to walk round to his room in the *Trinità de' Monti* and have further conversation over a glass of English whisky.

XXIII

It was eleven o'clock at night when Johnson Clarke paid his bill and his guests separated outside the restaurant. The Contessa had an Hispano-Suiza waiting for her with an Italian chauffeur who had been asleep at his wheel. She gave her hand to John Barton and let it linger in his grasp.

"*A rivederci!* Won't you call on me one day? You are so big and beautiful that I am very much in love with you."

"I greatly appreciate those kind words, Contessa," said John, smiling down upon her, and perfectly resolved that nothing on earth would induce him to call on her.

The others were laughing and chattering. Their laughter rang out into the silence of a Roman night. When they had all gone there was a wonderful quietude. The Eternal City was sleeping on its seven hills. John Barton and Henry Merivale stood for a few minutes on the Terrace looking at the vista of Rome under a sky still darkly blue, spangled with a million stars. Down below them they could see the Piazza del Popolo with its monolith, and the long streets between the palaces and churches with shadows as black as ink between the buildings. On the hills beyond, tall cypresses, like black spears, were etched against the sky and seemed to touch the stars.

"A city of ghosts!" said Merivale in a low voice.

John Barton agreed, speaking also in low tones as though hushed by this silence and this view.

"*Roma Eterna!*" said Merivale presently. "When one stands here one seems to be in touch with eternity. The little trivialities and vulgarities of life drop from one's mind. One

seems to hear the silent step of time, and yet to belong to the past which was yesterday. Some of those stones are still as white as when they were raised two thousand years ago or more. Sometimes I think I hear the tramp of the Roman legions and the shouts of the Roman populace crying '*Ave Caesar!*' These Romans were great people, great road-makers and great law-makers. We English and you Americans are part-heirs of their tradition."

He seemed self-conscious for a moment because of this solemnity.

"Come and have a drink," he said abruptly.

He had a handsome apartment with painted ceilings in a tall house on the high terrace of Trinità de' Monti. It was furnished in the Italian style with painted furniture and on the walls were some paintings which looked like Old Masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He switched on a light under one of them with a word or two of comment.

"Domenichino. A charming thing, don't you think?"

Presently, after handing John a glass of whisky and offering him a cigar, he spoke of Lucia Boldini, who had asked him certain questions.

"An intelligent little creature! She has more brains than her husband, who is not a bad fellow, though he likes to talk nonsense. She was quite right when she said that England has quarrelled with her only friends, or at least with the two countries who most wished to be friends with her."

"Morally one can't be friends with the dictators," said John, with his clear-cut American mind.

Henry Merivale glanced at him with a smile and then gave a sigh which was half a groan, as once before that evening.

"No? Then we must make up our minds to fight them, and that's a prospect that fills me with horror. England isn't strong enough to take on Germany and Italy and perhaps Japan as well. Where are our armies? Our Air Force is negligible compared with Germany's—and these people

here are getting strong in the air. How are we going to defend Egypt if we're cut off in the Mediterranean by Italian submarines? Our foreign policy seems to me all wrong. We ought to have accepted Hitler's peace offers when he made them, and before he began to feel his strength after prodigious rearmament. He offered to restrict his armaments to the lowest level of general agreement. We refused. He offered to abolish bombing aeroplanes and even to come back to the League of Nations. Our Mr. Eden sent him an insulting questionnaire. Hitler said he had no further quarrel with France and wanted nothing from France but friendship. The French Press spat at him. Now he makes no more offers. I fear we have missed the bus."

"I don't see how you people can compromise with bandits and brigands," said John with an uneasy laugh.

Henry Merivale took another view.

"Mussolini is more than a bandit. He's the greatest statesman in Europe, at least in astuteness of mind and audacious resolution. He belongs to the Italian tradition. He even belongs to the Roman tradition."

"Personally I've no use for him," said John stoutly. "After Abyssinia I write him down as a brigand and a murderer. But then I'm only an American reporter."

Henry Merivale laughed quietly.

"Perhaps I ought not be talking like this to an American reporter! But this is a private conversation, of course."

"Sure," said John.

Henry Merivale seemed reassured and continued his monologue.

"In Europe we have learnt, or ought to have learnt, not to think in terms of absolute right and wrong. In the past two thousand years we have all been wrong from time to time, and all history has been a series of compromises, advances, retreats and adjustments to events. It has always been a question of self-preservation and the survival of the fittest. Mankind hasn't dealt with its leaders on lines of

moral approbation or disapprobation. Napoleon didn't raise Europe against him because he had a mistress. Julius Caesar wasn't murdered because he didn't have the Nonconformist mind. We have to deal with these men as we find them, and none of them are all black or all white. Human nature doesn't work that way. Mussolini has good as well as bad in him. My own belief is that he has a genuine desire to avoid another European war. I give Hitler credit for certain sincerities. I loathe this division of the world into Fascism and democracy, as though all virtue lay in democracy and all villainy in Fascism. We prefer democracy, of course, but it has many weaknesses and many absurdities. In any case we have to work with the dictatorships in such a way that we don't fling the whole world into ruin and destroy civilization because of rival ideologies. Don't you agree?"

John didn't agree. He hated Fascism. He had a simple faith in democracy. He refused to compromise. But he was interested in this Englishman who revealed his idea so frankly. To John he seemed to be revealing the English mind, and especially the English diplomatic mind, all for avoiding a clash, all for compromise, all for self-preservation and self-interest. Hadn't he thought so all along? Wasn't this man confirming it?

"In the case of a world war," asked Henry Merivale, "would America fight with us on behalf of the democratic ideals?"

"I'm afraid our present mood is isolationist," answered John.

"In that case," said Henry Merivale quietly, "I don't see why American newspapers should always be jibing at us because we hesitate to declare war against the dictatorships. Isn't that a little inconsistent?"

"Well," said John, after a mental struggle, "Europe isn't our affair, after all."

"I'm not so sure," said Merivale. "The present state of Europe is due not a little to the work of President Wilson."

It was an argument which had been used, as John remembered, by an English girl named Anne Ede, whom he had found rather annoying at times, and at others alluring.

"The American people repudiated Wilson," he answered. "That's why we are so strong on isolation. We didn't get much thanks for our previous interference."

"Oh, well," said Merivale, as though tired of the argument. "One hears many points of view. Have another whisky, and tell me how things are going in New York. I haven't been there for fifteen years, when I had a very good time, I remember."

It was past one o'clock when John took his leave and walked through the silent streets of Rome back to his hotel.

XXIV

JOHN'S dinner at the Ulpia was very pleasant, he thought, with a sense of drama or light comedy lurking in the background of his mind. He had gone to fetch Anne from her hotel—the Excelsior—and drove with her to the restaurant in a Roman taxi-cab. She wore a white cloak over her evening frock, and he felt rather abashed for a few moments by her dazzling appearance. She had had her hair done by an Italian coiffeur and looked perfectly marvellous.

In the cab he was aware of the faint perfume with which she had scented herself, and it seemed very good to have her by his side so close that he could feel the warmth of her body.

"It's very sweet of you," she told him. "David is bringing along Teresa Grandini, to whom I'm going to be very kind. Little does she know that I'm her secret enemy! She regards me as a simple English girl with no more sense than a new-born kitten."

"Beware!" said John. "She may put poison in your soup. Wasn't there a dame named Lucrezia Borgia?"

"There was," answered Anne with a laugh. "I think Teresa must have a drop of her blood. She looks that type—beautiful but wicked."

If she looked like Lucrezia Borgia that lady must have been attractive. Like Lucia Boldini, her black hair was looped over the ears. She had the face of a nymph by Correggio, with roguish eyes and bow-shaped lips. She was a little thing, with a graceful figure and smooth white shoulders merging from her scarlet frock.

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David Ede, who had the face of a young Lancelot, treated her with a kind of grave tenderness as though she were under his protection. Every time he looked at her at table his eyes had a soft light in them and his lips were touched by a smile of devotion and adoration.

He greeted John with real friendliness and said how delighted he was to see him again. He also remembered Judy, whom he called Miss Judith in his formal English way.

"This is like a stage play," thought John as he glanced round the restaurant. "The Arts Theatre in New York would like to put on a scene like this."

The Ulpia is a restaurant partly built out of the old Forum of the Emperor Trajan and very close to its ruins. It has a semicircular room with copies of old Roman lamps on pedestals. In such a room Nero's officers might have sat down with their ladies before going on to the Coliseum to see a few Christians thrown to the wild beasts. Some of Mussolini's officers were at the tables. Perhaps some of them had seen the massacre of the Abyssinians. Man went on with his killing. The little tables were crowded by smart-looking people, among whom the waiters moved swiftly, carrying their dishes.

"Lucullus would have liked this place," thought John, searching his memory for a classical allusion. He wondered for a moment how much this party was going to cost him and how much he could put down to his expenses account.

"I came to this place with Father once," said Anne, who knew her Rome.

John had been introduced to the Contessa Grandini, whose eyes lingered on his for a moment, those eyes of the Danaë, seductive and humorous.

"You are an American?" she asked.

"Straight from New York by way of London," said John, making his bow.

"Without your clothes," said the Contessa, "I should know you as an American."

David Ede's fair skin flushed for a moment as he laughed at this remark.

"Our Puritan instinct is shocked!" he said, taking off her cloak and revealing her dainty figure with its white shoulders.

"Puritan?" asked the Contessa. "What is that? Is it a new form of ideology like Fascism or democracy? In Italy we are not shocked by nudity. God made our bodies, did He not? It is only the ugly who need be ashamed of them. I like to see the boys and girls on the Lido at Venice. They are like the gods and goddesses of our pagan Italy."

At the dinner-table Anne sat next to this Italian lady with the two men opposite, and John noticed how strange was the contrast between these two girls, as he called them in his mind. Anne with her broad brow and fair hair was utterly Saxon. This Teresa Grandini was utterly Latin. Anne's blue-grey eyes were honest. The Italian's eyes were filled with smiling insincerity and with much feminine guile. She might have been one of the women of the Renaissance and a fit mate for one of those men, half tiger and half poet, who loved art and beauty and would stab an enemy through the throat as light-heartedly as they would pick their teeth. There was wonderful grace in her hands. They were like drooping flowers. Her smile was elusive and secretive, as though she smiled at hidden thoughts. Once she stretched out her white arm and touched David Ede's hand with the tips of her fingers, which had scarlet nails. At this touch the boy—he was only that—looked at her shyly and blushed very faintly.

"How nice you have been to David!" said Anne presently. "It's been so nice for him to see something of Roman Society outside the usual diplomatic circle, which is very narrow as a rule."

"David has been nice to me," said the Contessa. "I am very lonely now that my husband is so long away in Lybia."

Anne was sympathetic.

"How sad for you! It must be agonizing to be parted from him so long."

Teresa Grandini shrugged her shoulders prettily.

"He loves his duty! He is a soldier first. He prefers being with his regiment in Lybia."

"Isn't that very noble of him?" asked Anne. "It must be glorious to be the wife of a hero. Don't you agree, David?"

David looked profoundly uneasy, but answered with an attempt at humour.

"They say no man is a hero to his own valet. Perhaps no man is a hero to his own wife. As a matter of fact, I don't believe much in heroes or hero-worship. Isn't it the cause of our present troubles in the world—the mass adulation of self-made leaders? What shall we drink?"

Perhaps Anne overplayed her part a little. She was almost too sympathetic to the Contessa in her loneliness, almost too anxious to persuade David that he was being mothered by this faithful and adoring wife of an Italian hero.

The Contessa smiled into her eyes and protested against this use of the word "mothered".

"I am not yet a hundred years old," she said. "Do I look like the mother of a tall young man?"

"I mean mothering in the moral sense," Anne explained. "I'm sure you give him good advice in all matters of diplomacy and social life. Every young man needs the guidance of a woman of experience."

"Anne!" exclaimed David with a nervous laugh. "What's come over you to-night? You're talking the most awful nonsense."

"Sorry," said Anne demurely. "I thought I was uttering the words of truth and wisdom. I wanted to thank Teresa for all her kindness to you."

"You are too sweet," said the Contessa. "We understand each other perfectly."

"In the time of the Renaissance," thought John, smiling over his minestrone, "it is at this moment that Lucrezia Borgia would use her poisoned dagger."

Anne turned to David for a few minutes and began to

talk of family affairs. Aldermere, she said, was going to rack and ruin because of the increase in income tax. Mother had to get rid of another gardener and cut down the domestic staff. Frank was doing very badly with his garage.

"Father is getting very worried," she added gloomily. "Of course, your expenses in Rome are an extra burden to him."

"Oh, Lord!" said David with a light groan. "Isn't this rather gloomy talk at the festive board? Let us eat, drink, and be merry."

"Your father is an English earl, is he not?" asked Teresa Grandini. "How, then, can he be poor?"

Anne stressed the extreme poverty of English earls and especially of the Earl of Stanfield.

"We're completely stony broke," she said. "David has to economize frightfully. Don't you, David?"

Anne explained matters confidentially to the Contessa.

"It was the World War which ruined the old country families of England. Somebody had to pay for it, of course, and it was our crowd that paid, without whining, thank goodness! It cleared a good many of them out of their houses. They had to sell their pictures to the rich Americans. They had to sell their timber and their land. We can only hold on at Aldermere by the skin of our teeth. When Father dies, Frank—that's my eldest brother—won't be able to keep up the estate, and David will have to go without his pocket-money. Tragic, isn't it?"

She laughed at its tragedy, but it was quite obvious to John that she was giving a warning to the Italian wench that if she deserted a hero husband in favour of David there would be no life of luxury ahead.

The Contessa listened to all this with amusement and tranquillity.

"It is all relative," she decided. "What is poverty in England is wealth in Italy. In any case David has promised to take me to dinner at the Valadier to-morrow. He will drive

me out in his very nice car. He will no doubt pay for my dinner. I shall enjoy myself very much."

"How splendid!" cried Anne. "Henry Merivale has also invited me to dine with him at Valadier's to-morrow evening. We shall be able to join forces again. Won't that be delightful?"

David was aware of a quick exchange of glances between David and his Italian lady.

"That's odd," said David. "Merivale told me he was going to dine with his old Cardinal to-morrow."

For a moment Anne was slightly disconcerted, but made a quick recovery.

"Oh, I don't think so! I rang him up on the telephone this morning. He insisted that I should dine with him to-morrow evening. Perhaps his old Cardinal has fallen ill."

It was obvious to John that Anne had rung up Merivale—or would ring him up—as a fellow conspirator to rescue young David from the clutches of this nymph. But she would have a difficult adventure. David would soon begin to realize and resent this attempt to close round him. His loyalty to his sister, who had arrived unexpectedly in Rome, made him delighted to see her and obliged him to be with her as much as possible, but it was as clear as the dome of St. Peter's that he had a romantic passion for this little Circe, who had put her spell upon him and would not be induced to release him without a fight.

After dinner they went round to David's rooms, and Anne turned on the radio to dance music and invited John to take a turn round the room with her. It was the first time he had held her in his arms, and he found it pleasant.

"You're a terrible play-actress," he told her in a low voice. "I used to think you had no guile in you!"

"I'm trying to save an innocent brother from a wicked woman," she told him with her face close to his. "God be with me."

The innocent brother was sitting on a stool next the settee,

in which was the wicked woman with one white arm across a scarlet cushion. Presently she raised her hand and let her fingers play in David's hair.

"Isn't it awful, this love business?" said Anne under cover of the music which came from Milan to the "wireless" in David's rooms. "Five years ago David was a lanky school-boy keen on cricket. Now he's bewitched by a woman who belongs to the pages of Boccaccio. A pretty slut!"

"I wouldn't say love is awful exactly," said John. "It depends on those who love, doesn't it? I've been too busy to let it worry me much."

"Don't you ever get any leisure?" asked Anne.

Now, what did she mean by that? he wondered.

XXV

JOHN had various introductions in Rome which kept him busy. He made an enquiry into the economic situation in Italy, and after interviews with various experts he decided that it was not exactly rosy. The Abyssinian adventure had been a tremendous drain on Italy's reserves of wealth. Even before that African war trade had been at a low ebb and taxation had already reached its limit. It was the opinion of Italians, as well as Americans and English, that Mussolini had plunged into Abyssinia partly to distract attention from his internal difficulties and to stifle popular criticism by the easy way of rallying enthusiasm by war fever and appeals to patriotism.

He had done that. Sanctions against Italy had exalted the spirit of the people to sacrificial heights for a time, but now that the adventure was over Abyssinia was no longer an agreeable subject of conversation. Mussolini, so far, had garnered only Dead Sea Fruit, and acquired an Empire of rocks, deserts and black tigers. Those black tigers hid themselves in the jagged mountains, and at night crept down to cut up Italian transport and isolated garrisons. They were never safe, these Italian soldiers, beyond their own lines. Many of them could be fed only by aeroplanes. The roads made for war purposes by indomitable labour had already been washed away by African rains. Italian colonists, duped by the promise of goodwill and the glorious adventure of a pioneer life, were fever-stricken and dejected. Many of them had already returned with stories of hardship and misery, which were whispered about Italy. The price of Abyssinia was still a high one.

And yet there were great mysteries. American and English economists prophesied the bankruptcy of Italy. They said it had already exhausted its possibilities of maintaining internal credit. Its gold reserve was depleted, they said. Mussolini's financial experts were breathing hard. But there was no outward and visible sign of ruin in Italy. These Romans were well dressed. They seemed to have a margin for the fun of life. Great public works costing millions of lira were being undertaken. Rome was being made more magnificent.

John drove out with Anne to the Mussolini Forum one day. That must have cost many millions for all its stadiums and architecture. It was like the dream of one of the old Caesars, a splendid and audacious vision brought to reality by Italian genius and labour. Round the main stadium stood nude and gigantic figures of heroic youth, dazzling white in the sunshine, symbolizing all the Italian cities.

John was somewhat abashed under the influence of American puritanism by all this male nudity, but Anne gazed at the figures with straight eyes and made a comment which raised his laughter.

"It looks like a nudist colony," she said. "They would look better with a touch of tan."

"Where does all the money come from to build these pleasure grounds?" asked John.

Anne seemed to have the right idea.

"Does money mean anything nowadays? Don't they just print it?"

Perhaps that was the truth of it all. Now that the gold standard had been abandoned a nation like Italy could use national credit to the nth degree provided it was based upon their own labour and materials. The trouble came only when they had to buy raw material from outside sources. But it was all very mysterious. The United States, with the greatest gold reserve in the world, with all natural resources available, with unlimited and efficient labour, with a technical genius

which had led the world, was at that very time in the depths of trade depression with fifteen million unemployed and stagnation in Wall Street. Mr. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" had failed to solve the problem.

He didn't pursue the subject with Anne. He had a pleasant morning with her and found her kind to him. They drove back to Rome and wandered about old ruins which were once the palaces of the Caesars, not wholly destroyed after two thousand years. She took his hand down a long flight of steps which had been trodden by the sandals of Caligula, and stood together in the semi-darkness of great vaulted chambers with bits of marble still hanging to their walls in the Domus Aurea, the Golden House of Nero. They saw the bath where Poppæa lay every morning in goat's milk, and followed a guide who startled them once by calling out the name of Nero down a long dark passage which led to the stables and office of the Imperial Guards. An answer came back. It was an echo which shouted "Nero! Nero!" in a sepulchral voice.

Anne clutched John's hand and laughed in the gloom.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "All this is very ghostly. It's beginning to give me the creeps."

They were glad to get out into the sunlight of a spring day and walk through the gardens of the Vestal Virgins opposite the Temple of Venus with its tall white columns.

"I'm having an interview with Mr. Smith to-night," said John. "I can't say I'm looking forward to it. He doesn't speak much English, I believe, and I shall have to talk to him there through an interpreter, which always ruins my style."

"My Italian is pretty good," said Anne. "Take me! I'd give him the glad eye and you would get an extra special interview."

It was, of course, out of the question. Also John disapproved of any respectable young woman giving the glad eye to a man whom he regarded as one of the bandits of the modern world.

They argued about that. Anne annoyed him by expressing enthusiastic admiration of the Italian Duce. She said that he had raised Italy to the place of a first-class power, and that he had done marvellous things for the spirit and social life of the Italian people.

"The spirit?" exclaimed John. "Hasn't he killed the soul of the people by suppression of free speech and the enslavement of their minds?"

"You're talking like a Labour politician!" said Anne. "They write that sort of stuff in the *Daily Worker*. Do these people look enslaved? Does Italian youth look cowed and oppressed? Why, he has given them a sense of pride in their own destiny."

"What destiny?" asked John grimly. "The shambles of a world war?"

"Mussolini is a genius," repeated Anne, evading an answer to that question.

"An evil genius," answered John, "but we won't quarrel about it. I'm not going to let an Italian dictator spoil a happy day. Where are you going to lunch with me?"

They lunched very pleasantly in a little restaurant down the Via Sistina. It was the first time he had had a meal with her alone. He found it a charming experience. Anne was in a laughing mood. She laughed when he said that their Italian waiter had a certain tenderness in his attentions to them at table.

"He thinks we're having a little love-affair. His Italian mind is touched by our romantic appearance. Little does he know that we're talking about international politics and other dull subjects."

"Let's play up a little," suggested Anne. "Are you any good at play-acting?"

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Not bad," said Anne, with suppressed mirth.

She raised her glass and drank to him with her eyes.

"How's that?"

"I like it," said John. "I don't believe I'm play-acting. It seems to come natural."

Anne spoilt it all by laughing and refusing to let him hold her hand under the tablecloth.

"We're becoming rather absurd," she told him.

XXVI

JOHN had his interview with Mussolini in the Piazza Venezia, and in spite of his dislike of Fascism and its leader was impressed by the personality of Il Duce. He was in a good humour and there was a not unkindly look in his eyes as John advanced down the highway of the long room where he sat at his desk before rising and holding out his hand.

He spoke a few words in fair English before turning to the interpreter—a tall, elegant young man who stood waiting to give his services.

"I wish to be friends with the American people," said Signor Mussolini, "but American newspapers call me a bandit from time to time. You will go away, no doubt, and call me a bandit or an ice-cream merchant. What will you ask me?"

John asked him some questions about the economic state of Italy, which the Duce answered with complete optimism touched by cynicism.

"We are not enslaved by the fetish of gold," he said, and after a disquisition on the industry of the Italian people and their spirited sacrifice for the good of the State he began to be the questioner, and asked John to explain the economic distress of the United States, who had possession of all the natural resources and half the world's gold supply, as well as the finest technical machine in the world. It was John Barton of the *New York Observer* who was being interviewed by a man of restless intelligence and penetrating curiosity. Suddenly after twenty minutes he glanced at a little ormolu clock on his desk and sprang up with a laugh. "*Accidente!*"

It's half past nine. I have a thousand things to do. Excuse me, signor. *Buona sera!*"

John was dismissed and led away by the interpreter, who spoke to him down the corridor.

"You were greatly favoured! The Duce was in an excellent mood. I shall be glad to see anything you write about it."

It was this interview which justified John's visit to Rome, but he had learnt more about Italian conditions from other sources and did not believe a word about Mussolini's optimism on economic affairs, nor certain words he had spoken about his firm desire to establish European peace. How did he reconcile that with his propaganda against the English in Egypt and Palestine? How did he reconcile that with his speeches glorifying the martial spirit and the cleansing fire of war? How did he reconcile this love of peace with his support of General Franco in Spain, to whom he was sending arms and ammunition and airmen and forty thousand "volunteers"? At that very time British merchant ships were being torpedoed in the Mediterranean by mysterious submarines which, without direct evidence, were believed to be Italian.

XXVII

THAT evening John had promised to go round to David's rooms. Anne would be there, she had told him, and there would also be Henry Merivale and the Contessa Grandini. He was a little late, having had to change, and he was surprised to find only Anne and Merivale in young Ede's apartment. It was Anne who came forward to greet him. She was wearing an old-fashioned frock puffed out below her waist and square-cut across her breast. The glitter of lights from the Venetian candelabra touched her fair hair and put shadows below her eyes, which were very bright this evening.

"David is kept late," she informed him. "His Chief wanted to see him and he had to stand by. We've had a telephone call from him."

"Diplomacy must be like newspaper work," said John. "Very uncertain, late hours, and a lot of hanging about."

"How did you get on with Mr. Smith?" asked Anne. "Mr. Merivale and I are dying to hear."

He gave an account of his interview and kept them interested until he was interrupted by the arrival of the Contessa Grandini in a black silk frock, with bare arms and shoulders and a red rose in her hair.

"How enchanting you look to-night!" she exclaimed, taking Anne's hands and kissing her on both cheeks. "You have surely stepped out of a picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds."

Anne curtsied prettily at this compliment.

"David is not here?" asked Teresa. "There is something the matter with him?"

For a moment she looked at Anne with suspicion—almost with a hint of anger.

"Oh, David's all right," said Anne lightly. "He has been sent for by his Chief. Some diplomatic affair, no doubt. Possibly Mr. Smith has decided to send another contingent of volunteers to Spain."

"I don't like David's Chief," said Teresa in a vexed tone. "He is always keeping the poor boy from his friends. Are there not office hours? Is it not necessary that when a gentleman invites a lady to his rooms he should be there to receive her? Or do the English pay no attention to social conventions?"

It was Henry Merivale who answered.

"Diplomats' arrangements for private entertainment are always subject to the call of duty, Contessa. I've found by thirty years' experience that whenever I give a dinner party some despatch arrives to upset my plans and infuriate my cook. It's a hard life with occasional compensations."

"It's so foolish, this Diplomatic Service," exclaimed the Contessa. "It is so old-fashioned now that there are telephones and telegraphs. When there is a crisis every week or so some political leader arrives by air and the Ambassadors are just office boys. Is it not so?"

"There's a lot of truth in what you say," agreed Merivale good-naturedly. "Old-fashioned diplomacy has degenerated sadly owing to the speeding up of communications and the indiscretions of the Press. There are no secrets. The personal touch has been superseded. Drama has gone out of our job, and with it those dangerous ladies to whom one made love in order to learn the secrets of their husbands."

Teresa Grandini moved about the room restlessly. She seemed to know its arrangements and helped herself to a cigarette out of a little silver box on a little table with a shaded lamp.

"Play something, Anne," said Henry Merivale. "Let us have sweet music until David comes."

"Oh, I'm not much good," said Anne, but she went to a rosewood piano and touched its keys before playing one of Chopin's reveries.

John, the observer, found this a picture worth remembering—that English girl at the piano in this room with a painted ceiling in which many Italian ladies must have sat through two centuries of time. Merivale's long lean face was touched with light as he sat listening with one hand to his cheek. And there was that Grandini woman, with her looped hair, tapping one little foot against the rail of a chair while she sat back on the sofa with one bare arm flung across a cushion. Her eyes met John's for a moment and she smiled at him. What did she mean by that smile? He had the idea that she was a very dangerous little lady from whom if he stayed in Rome he would keep at a safe distance. She was more dangerous even than the Countess Massaccio, who had invited him to her rooms. She belonged, he thought, to the pre-Christian era. He could imagine her in Roman woods, clad in skins, with vine leaves round her head. He had read of her in old mythology. She was a nereid—wasn't that the right name?—in the rooms of David Ede.

Anne slurred her notes on the piano as David came in, and called out to him:

"Hullo, David! Glad you've come at last. An international crisis?"

John thought that David Ede in his evening clothes looked extraordinarily handsome because of his fine slim figure. But he was pale and obviously distressed.

"A private crisis," he said. "I'm being pushed out of Rome! I'm being sent to Berlin. Can you imagine anything more damnable?"

He went over to Teresa Grandini and bent over her hand, kissing it.

"I have to go in three days," he said in a tragic voice. "I can't bear the thought of it."

Teresa Grandini shrugged her white shoulders slightly and then laughed.

"So I lose you, eh? I guessed that I should lose you, my boy David. When your sweet sister came I smelt a little plot within five seconds. I am not a simpleton. I am an Italian. We have our intuition."

She turned suddenly to Anne with a burning flame in her eyes.

"So you take your baby boy away from me? You have him sent to Berlin! You rescue him from my evil spell! It would spoil his career, would it not? It would bring disgrace on your English family? It is not permitted in your Puritan England to have a little love affair with a married woman. You are hypocrites and fools! You do not understand love. You are incapable of passion. You are frogs. David is a frog. He is as cold as ice even when I put my arms about him and laugh into his eyes. He has a thousand inhibitions. He blushes when I speak of passion to him. He talks about divorce and marriage when I come late to these rooms. He holds me away as a temptress when I put my cheek against his, and my fingers through his hair, and try to teach him the loveliness of woman. Do you think I mind because he goes to Berlin? He amused me for a little while. He bored me after a little while. It was baby-snatching to make him love me. I will not break my heart when in three days he goes to Berlin. I shall laugh for two minutes and perhaps break something because I am a little angry. That is all. Then I look round for other friends who will amuse me and take me out to dinner and pay for what I like, and do not care whether I have a husband in Lybia. I am a little angry for the moment, it is true. I have to break something before I laugh."

She snatched a lovely vase from a shelf within her reach and flung it on to the polished boards, where it smashed into small pieces. She gave a light ringing laugh and then went towards David and took his head in both her hands and smiled into his eyes.

"You will fall in love with some fat German girl," she said.

"She will suit you better, David. The Germans are more like the English. So dull! So boring!"

He stood quite still and very pale.

"I don't understand," he said in a low voice. "I fail to understand."

Teresa Grandini drew his head closer to hers and kissed him on the lips.

"You are so simple!" she said. "You make me feel a thousand years old. I felt I was making love to a choirboy. It is a shame, I said inside myself. He is like a shepherd boy and I am like Venus in a picture by Giorgione. He has not yet learned the ways of love. He is too young and too innocent. But I have not hurt you, my little one. I had pity on you. And now I am tired of you so that it had to end, did it not? *Addio, caro mio!*"

She turned to Anne and smiled at her.

"You are not so simple," she said. "Behind your blue English eyes there is the craft of women. You arranged this very well. You are a damn' little English cat."

"Shut up!" said Anne. "David is well rid of you. You're perfectly vile."

"Shall I fetch you a cab, Contessa?" asked Merivale politely.

"Thank you," said Teresa Grandini. "You are always very kind."

She smiled and left the room with him.

"Teresa!" cried David Ede.

Something had broken in him. For a moment his English mask fell away from him. Behind it was the horror of a young man who sees the Medusa head where once he saw the beauty of a woman he loved.

It was Anne who went to him and put her arms about him.

XXVIII

JOHN's stay in Rome was cut short by a tragic cablegram. It was handed to him by the hall porter of the Albergo Flora, and after he had read it his face went very white and for a moment he looked stunned. In the hall where he stood a new group of tourists had arrived, and they were all laughing and chattering as they waited for their baggage to be carried up to their rooms. The Italian hall-porter seemed to speak all languages with equal fluency. He noticed the distress of this tall young American and spared a moment for human sympathy.

"Not good news, mister?"

"Bad news," said John, turning on his heel and walking sharply away.

It was news from Judy that his father was dead.

It had never entered his head that his father's poor health was of any serious account. Judy had written several times saying that her father was not too well, that he worried about business affairs and world conditions, that he had lost his appetite, that he had a slight cough. But John hadn't paid much attention to all that. He had been vexed with Judy for going back too soon. He had rebuked her, he remembered, for being "morbid" because her father fretted for her. Now he felt conscience-stricken, and the news of his father's death was like a stab at the heart. They had always been on good terms. He had love and respect for the author of his being, always kind, thoughtful, and anxious for his son's well-being and happiness. Although a man of old-

fashioned instincts, touched with the Puritanism of an earlier age, he had never been stern or harsh in family life. He had been unfailingly patient with his wife, whose enthusiasms for quacks and charlatans and psychical adventures seemed to him very unsound. He had doted on Judy, and from her earliest childhood had done his best to spoil her, without success. During John's time at Harvard, and afterwards in newspaper work, the "old man", as John called him, had been inordinately proud of any little success achieved by his son. He had had an exaggerated idea of John's genius, John's future greatness, John's contemporary fame. Now he was dead, and John would never again see his dry, humorous smile, nor feel the grip of his friendly hand. Something had gone out of life which would leave him with a sense of desolation—the loss of a good friend, an understanding mind, a wise man always to be trusted in any crisis and in any trouble, one of the best of fathers.

John had a luncheon engagement with Anne after last night's drama, but he cancelled it over the telephone.

"Not coming!" asked Anne. "How's that, Mr. Faithless?"

He told her the news, and for a moment she was silent before expressing sympathy.

"I'm sorry. Death is awful, isn't it?"

"I'm taking the fast train to Paris," said John. "I shall fly to London. I may get the *Europa* to New York."

Anne was again silent for a moment.

"Have you finished with England?" she asked. "Shall I see you again one day? Or do we say good-bye—that very hateful word?"

"Not good-bye! Just *au revoir*."

He spoke with a hint of emotion which he tried to check.

"I shall always remember these days in Rome—meeting you, and having a good time, and wanting it to go on always."

He could hear the surprise in her voice. He could also see her slightly raised eyebrows.

"Always? Oh, nothing lasts as long as that. But I'm glad you'll come back to England."

"Thanks," said John. "Shall I find you there?"

"Why not?" asked the invisible Anne.

"I mean find you as you are now, kind to an American and not seriously engaged elsewhere?"

Anne laughed faintly down the telephone.

"I don't know about that! Don't stay away too long."

"There's something I wanted to say to you," said John rather desperately, "but I can't say it over the telephone. It would sound so silly."

"Risk it!" she answered.

John hesitated, and then spoke gravely.

"No, I don't think so. You would think it cheek. The death of my father spoils everything."

"I'm sorry," said Anne.

He spoke for a moment of David.

"I'm glad you rescued him from Lucrezia Borgia. She isn't really nice, I should say."

"I should say she isn't! David has had a lucky escape."

"You're a great diplomat!" said John.

He heard her laugh again, very faintly.

"It wasn't difficult—just a word in the right quarter—I shall have to look after David in Berlin. He's very young and innocent."

"Maybe I'll meet you in Berlin," said John. "Who knows?"

"It's pleasant in the Tiergarten," she told him. "Well, then"—he knew enough Italian to understand her last words—"*A rivederci!*"

"Say, Anne!" he called down the telephone, but she had gone.

XXIX

THERE had been many things to discuss and arrange at the home in Massachusetts after the death of John's father. Judy was, as usual, a tower of strength in a time of crisis, and it was upon her advice that an offer was accepted for the goodwill, plant and stock of the linoleum factory. John had no desire to abandon newspaper work to run this business, which had been in low water since 1930, and though his mother resisted for quite a time, for sentimental reasons, the idea of letting it go into other hands, she was persuaded at last to take an offer which relieved the family from this responsibility. It wasn't magnificent, that offer, but it would assure her enough to live comfortably, with something to spare for Judy and Lucy.

A new plan for the immediate future was urged by John, and he saw a light leap into Judy's eyes when he first proposed it. It was that his mother and sister should come over to England and set up house with him for the duration of his time as London Correspondent of the *New York Observer*, or at least for a year or two.

Mrs. Barton wept a little at this idea.

"I couldn't leave all my friends," she cried. "Even for the love of you, John, I couldn't make such a sacrifice. I'm not so young as I was. When one gets old one needs one's friends and familiar ways. I couldn't take my little trips into Boston. It would be terribly hard for me to give up my séances and psychical research. Now that your poor father is gone I want to get into touch with him on the other side."

"That's all right, Mother," said John soothingly. "I've

no doubt you could find some very good séances in London, and any amount of table-rapping and table-turning."

"Now you're laughing at me, John!" protested Mrs. Barton. "I don't call that kind of you at a time like this."

John assured her that he was only trying to be helpful.

Judy added her persuasions.

"It might be good for you, Mother, to spend a year or two in London. You'd meet all kinds of new people who would be very kind to you. After all, we shall be a little dull and melancholy if we stay on in this old house, always seeing Father's empty chair and moping over our sense of loss. But, of course, I wouldn't dream of urging you to get away if you've set your mind against it."

Judy was ready for self-sacrifice, but John could see clearly enough that she yearned to escape again from a home life which had lost some of its meaning now that the "old man" had gone. Perhaps she had a sentimental reason for wanting to come to London again, though she never mentioned it. That fellow Robin Bramley—John wasn't sure what was the situation in regard to that friendship. Anne had said something about it and suggested that her eccentric cousin was very sweet on Judy. Was Judy especially attracted, or was it one of those laughing comradeships which she had had with other men? Anyhow, John felt certain in his own mind that his proposal of housekeeping in London for a year or two would be best for the general happiness of everybody, including himself. There was Lucy to think of as well. He had an idea at the back of his head that Lucy's French marriage was not all that it should be, though he had never mentioned that incident outside the Dôme café when Lucy's husband had arrived with a little lady on an evening when he pretended he was working overtime. It would be nice for Lucy to have her mother within easy distance.

Alfred Feversham threw his weight into the scales of this argument and persuaded Mrs. Barton to abandon the old house for a while.

"It will do you a power of good," he told her. "You need fresh scenes and new faces, dear lady. Poor old John, whom I miss more than I can say, would be the first to support this idea of a trip to England with a son who will be mighty glad to have you, and a daughter who is making a martyr of herself for duty's sake. Now take my advice, because I'm a wise man so long as I'm advising other people!"

"And so say all of us!" added Diana, who had her arm round Judy's waist as they came in from the porch on an evening when there was the first hint of early summer in its lengthening light and touch of warmth.

John felt a trifle uneasy in the presence of Diana Feversham. He contrasted her with Anne Ede, who had occupied his thoughts a good deal after his flight from Rome. Diana was typically American, as now he could see after his English sojourn. She was, he thought, still, a very good specimen of American girlhood. Once he had been in love with her. At least she had touched his senses and imagination. If he hadn't gone to New York and then to England he might have followed his fate in her direction. What was that epigram which Robert Bramley had thrown out once in an ironical way? "Allah is great, but juxtaposition is greater." Anne was a different type altogether, typically English, English in every fibre of her body and brain. What made them so utterly different? Was it just accent and manner, and the fashion of a frock, and the different style of hairdressing, or did it go enormously deeper? Anne was frank and almost blunt and yet had secret reserves, conscious and unconscious traditions, of which he knew nothing except that they existed.

Diana had no mystery. He could read her, he thought, like an open book. She was perfectly straight and simple on the usual American lines, with the usual American reactions of sentiment, idealism, and angle of view. He had no quarrel with that. He felt more at ease with her than with Anne. He liked her better really from the point of view of comradeship and understanding. She was charming and fine and vital.

But Anne had something else, elusive, indefinable, mysterious, and romantic. She was Rosalind in the Forest of Arden. If he had stayed two days later in Rome he would have burnt his boats.

"What do you think of the English girls, John?" asked Diana. "Have you fallen for any of them?"

He answered cautiously, disguising his sense of embarrassment by a laugh.

"I'm getting used to their accent and their little affectations. I dare say they're very much like American girls in the essential elements of human nature."

"Bryan seems to get on with them," said Diana. "Lady this and Lady the other. He's becoming a frightful snob. I suppose he'll end by marrying an English peeress who talks about huntin' and fishin' and wears a tiara at the breakfast-table."

"Tell me," said Alfred Feversham, "what's the feeling in England now about the ex-King? I still think he didn't get a square deal."

"Oh, Pop," cried Diana, "is there anything more to say about that?"

"I'm still trying to get a clue to the English mind," said John. "It works in mysterious ways. Now and again I think I get a glimpse of their national character. And then I know I'm wrong."

Alfred Feversham laughed good-naturedly.

"You seem to know a hell of a lot about it when you write your interpretation for the *New York Observer*! That's the fellow who knows, I say to my friends at the club. If you want to know what's going on in England, you read John Jennings Barton, Jr. He's telling you."

John's sense of humour appreciated this touch of irony.

"We newspaper men have to take a chance now and then," he answered. "We try to get as near to the truth as may be possible on limited evidence."

So after these family discussions all was arranged. John's

mother and Judy would come to England as soon as they could let the house for a time. Meanwhile, John was to look about for a furnished house in London—somewhere in the neighbourhood of Knightsbridge, said Judy, who, for some reason, blushed after making that suggestion.

And meanwhile, John would be back in London just in time for the Coronation of King George. It would keep him pretty busy as soon as he arrived.

XXX

LONDON was in scaffolding with barricades being built in many streets when John walked its pavements again. It was not for a siege but a coronation, and presently, on the way of the processional route, there were miles of blue and crimson cloth draping the woodwork of the stands and the stone balconies of the clubs and mansions. Bond Street was a bower of flowers and flags. Old gentlemen in Pall Mall could not find their way to their clubs through small apertures between the stands. To his critical and American eye it all looked like a gigantic circus before the clowns came out to fall over themselves. It was not the London which he knew.

He felt a kind of hostility to all this preparation, having a sentimental regard for the ex-King who had given up his crown for the love of one of John's own countrywomen. The new King seemed to possess all the virtues necessary for his job, according to the most respectable traditions of his folk, but somehow John had a grudge against the English for letting Edward go. Anyhow, as an American he was not vastly impressed by this "King business", which seemed to him an anachronism and all rather absurd. The Coronation ceremony, he thought, would be an empty mummery with no meaning for modern life and ways of thought. The Crown, the Orb and the Sceptre were, he thought, but silly symbols of mediaeval mysticism which no longer meant a darned thing. It was all, surely, a survival of feudalism, a quaint old pageant like the Lord Mayor's Show, which got in the way of traffic and the ordinary business of life. Picturesque, of course, but utterly useless and very time-wasting.

Such thoughts as these passed through his mind before the day of the Coronation of George VI, though he did not express them openly to English friends, who seemed quite reconciled to the change of kings. Those thoughts were in the background of his mind again when he took his place in the Abbey very early on the morning of May 12th.

He had a sense of personal grievance at having to get up so early, and Mrs. Pockett, that motherly soul, had had to shake him before he grunted in response to her announcement that she had a nice cup o' tea ready for him.

"Oh, hell!" said John, without the necessary gratitude for these attentions.

"You ought to think yourself lucky," said Mrs. Pockett when he sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "If I 'ad a place in the Abbey to-day I'd be as excited as a maid on 'er marriage day. Think of me, dearie, standing on the kerbstone and trying to see through the bodies of policemen and soldiers. What an 'ope!"

"You'll see it all on the pictures," said John. "And you'll see a lot more than I shall. I'm told my seat is sky-high and doesn't give a view of anything but a blank wall."

Mrs. Pockett was aware of great drama in the streets outside.

"'Ark," she said, listening to distant sounds. "There go the first carriages. Oh, 'ow I would like to see all the duchesses in their feathers and tiaras. They'll 'ave a long time to wait, poor dears, but they do say that there's every convenience for them."

"That's a blessing," said John.

"And don't forget your packet of sandwiches," Mrs. Pockett reminded him. "I've cut 'em nice and fresh."

For the first time in his life John put on a tall silk hat and a tailcoat and felt terrible in this costume as he studied himself in a mirror over the mantelpiece.

"My own mother wouldn't know me," he thought, before he showed himself off to Mrs. Pockett.

"Blimey!" she cried. "That's a bit of orl right, dearie. You look like an English gentleman!"

"That's how I feel," said John. "I never felt such a fool in my life."

He suddenly burst out laughing and his ill-humour vanished as he patted Mrs. Pockett on the rear side of her anatomy, and went to find a taxi-cab which had been hired on his behalf and was waiting for him in Burton Court, with the letters QN pasted on the windscreen as a sign that he could pass to a certain entrance of Westminster Abbey. Already there was a line of traffic along the Embankment, and through the windows of the passing cars he had glimpses of women with white feathers on their heads and glistening coronets and men in uniform with many decorations. Outside the Abbey vast crowds had already assembled. Some of them must have spent the night there. This old shrine of England was surrounded by vast stands already filling up with spectators. The road was kept clear by scarlet-coated soldiers. Mounted police officers rode down the sanded streets. Old bells were clashing. Military commands rang out. England was waiting for its new King to come for his Crown.

In the Abbey there was a great quietude, though many people were moving to their seats. Lamps were glimmering like stars between the grey columns. Through the high clerestory windows shafts of cold light struck aslant the nave and touched some of the pillars. The old Abbey had been turned into a vast auditorium with high tiers of boxes and galleries draped in gold and blue. Along the highway of the nave was spread a blue carpet reaching to the stage where the Altar stood. Facing the Altar was a worm-eaten wooden chair—the chair of Saxon Edward—with its seat above an old stone on which many kings had been crowned away back in the mists of time.

An American observer took in this scene and was not untouched by a sense of romance and beauty.

Before taking his seat he showed his card to a young man

in silk knee-breeches and a cut-away coat who said: "Hullo, Barton," in a quiet voice. "How's Judy?"

It was Robin Bramley disguised as a fairy prince in a pantomime.

"You're looking fine," said John, in a low voice, astounded by this apparition. "Where did you get that fancy dress?"

"Moss Brothers," answered Bramley, with a twist of his humorous mouth. "Your seat is up that stairway."

He asked a question for the second time.

"How's Judy?"

John was unable to answer him owing to the pressure of people behind him. He went up a winding stairway like the spiral stairs of an ancient castle. At the top was an elderly gentleman with many medals who looked like a Field-marshal or the commissioner outside a New York hotel. He scrutinized the ticket severely, as though doubting its authenticity, and then pointed with a white staff to an arched doorway.

Beyond it was one of the tiers of seats which looked down to a dais with two thrones and the chair of St. Edward. The Altar was beyond view. It was a high perch, and the moving figures below were very small and distant until brought nearer by a pair of opera-glasses which John had brought in his tail pocket with his packet of sandwiches already squashed as flat as a pancake.

As he took his seat his arm was grasped by a friendly hand. It was Bryan Feversham wearing a white slip below his waistcoat and looking very sleek.

"A bird's-eye view," he remarked. "It's like being in the gallery of the Metropolitan Opera House."

Bryan Feversham had a lady by his side to whom he whispered from time to time. She was in Court dress with feathers in her hair and white gloves up to her elbows. She seemed on very good terms with Bryan, who failed to introduce her. But John was not in a conversational mood. He nodded to a few men he knew in the seats above and below—American

newspaper men and others—and then concentrated on the scene in the Abbey which he would have to describe for his own paper. All these people who for two hours kept crowding into the Abbey—eight thousand of them—were the political and social leaders of England. In all manner of uniforms they were living figures from some painted book of history whose pages came down to present days. Scarlet and gold. White and gold. Blue and gold. They were all the people who pulled the strings of the British puppet play.

Down below in the nave John saw the glint of gold-worked tabards worn by heralds and pursuivants. It looked like a scene in a Shakespearian play.

After a long while the peers and peeresses of the Realm arrived as though they had stepped out of the Middle Ages across the invisible threshold of time. The peers wore their long robes of purple red with capes of ermine, and held their coronets under their arms as knights carried their helmets. Some of them were very old and stumbled in their robes. Some of them were young and debonair.

Among the peeresses whose long purple gowns touched the stone floor was a lady whom once he had seen in big boots and dirty old gardening gloves—the Countess of Stanfield of Aldermere.

A young American reporter who by a freak of chance had come in touch with an old English family looked everywhere for one of its daughters.

He scanned many of the draped boxes from which pretty faces looked down. Once he thought he saw Anne, but then lost her and could not be sure.

Presently through the open doorway came the music of military bands. Inside the Abbey the organ played and its notes vibrated through the forest of stone. John Barton, American, critical of the "King business", intellectually hostile to its pageantry, was touched by strange vibrations. He was aware of old ghosts about him. He heard voices from the past as far back as the Saxon craftsmen whose stone-work was in

some of these walls. They were his ancestors. Hadn't his own people had their roots in the same soil? Hadn't they been the liegemen of English kings crowned in that worm-eaten chair? Among those kings were lion men and tiger men. Hadn't Norman William come striding to this place in his chain mail? Richard Coeur de Lion, with a great sword by his side, had come here for his Crown. All the great figures of English history had passed this way, like shadows passing—saints and heroes, and villains and sluts and fair women, and girls like Anne Ede, who had their blood in her veins and their spirit in her soul.

"Perhaps I undervalue tradition," thought John presently. "Here is the English tradition."

The Yeomen of the Guard were lining the nave. Princes and Princesses came, and then at last the King and Queen, received by their great Lords of State bearing the Regalia.

John's eyes were on the King—this young king who had come to the Throne by an astonishing trick of fate. He wore a queer little cap and a long mantle with an immense train held up by fairy-tale pages. He was followed by the Queen, a gracious little figure, whose train, stretching for yards, was carried by six young beauties who seemed to have stepped out of Tudor England.

Bryan Feversham nudged him and whispered:

"See that girl with the reddish hair? She was at that cocktail party I gave at the Carlton. Remember?"

For some reason John Barton resented these asides from Bryan. It was like chattering in church. And somehow his democratic mind was absorbed in this ceremony of Coronation. He was trying to get the meaning of it, if it had any meaning. He was trying to reconcile its symbolism with the affairs of everyday life. It seemed to have three threads. It was a religious service in which this young man who was being crowned dedicated himself to God. He was being anointed with holy oil as a priest. It was also his induction into the ancient order of knighthood by which he swore allegiance to

the ancient code of chivalry. Thirdly, it was the dedication of a King to the service of his people. These three threads were intertwined in a solemn ritual, noble in its pageantry, and beautiful. All English history was in that ceremonial, from the days of Norman William. Those men moving about the Altar, those peers on bended knee, those Garter kings and heralds, the Archbishops and Bishops, those Westminster boys shouting their "*Vivat!*" in the gallery, those women looking like Cinderella after the touch of the fairy godmother's wand, were in an unbroken line of succession from Plantagenet and Tudor days. It was the Crown which had their loyalty and not the individual who might wear it unworthily. It was the symbol of past history and future hope to which they gave their fealty.

It was an atavistic ceremonial. These people were worshipping their own past in times of heroism and struggle, plague, and famine, and wars, and all the adventure of a thousand years. They had done great things, these English. They had built a great Empire and sent their sons across the far seas to take their spirit and laws and speech to the uttermost ends of the earth. This old shrine, this Abbey, had stood four-square to the winds of fate hundreds of years before America was known. "A man of my blood and name may have touched this stone pillar five hundred years ago," thought John, touching a pillar. "After all, we Americans of the old stock have a share in this show."

He had an idea that this "show", as he called it, explained Anne Ede. She hadn't broken with the past like Diana Feversham. This symbolism was in her blood. It meant England to her. The old ghosts of history were nearer to her. She was haunted by them. It explained her pride, her dislike of modernity, and something which he had thought was snobbishness and arrogance. There was her brother, Viscount Ede, who held his coronet under his arm like a knight, though on workdays he ran a garage in Mayfair. It was all very odd, very interesting. Perhaps this "show" made him understand

the English people, who had shouted "God Save the King" for this tall lad upon whom they were just putting the weight of the old Crown when Edward, who was the uncrowned king, went to his exile for the sake of a woman. He too had shouted "God Save the King" in that last speech over the radio. It meant also "God Save England!" facing new dangers and new ordeals not long to be delayed.

XXXI

It was a few days after the Coronation when John saw Anne again and had a conversation with her. He met her in Knightsbridge, or rather was aware of a gloved hand waving to him out of a taxi-cab which slowed up by the kerb and revealed Anne at the window.

"I thought I saw the Statue of Liberty!" she told him. "What about taking me to tea somewhere? I have exactly three quarters of an hour for tea-table talk and, if lucky, strawberries and cream."

"Fine!" said John. "Only I wish it were three hours instead of three quarters. I suggest we see what that tea-house in Kensington Gardens can do for us. It might be pleasant on the greensward."

"What an imagination!" exclaimed Anne. "Only an American could have thought so quickly of exactly the right idea."

It would be pleasant to sit out of doors on a day which was warm for an English summer if one could avoid the sharp edge of a north-east wind. Anne, he noticed, wore a little fur round her neck and a business-like coat and skirt.

"The last time I saw you—at least, I believe I saw you," said John, "you were looking too grand for the likes of me. I sat worshipful from afar."

She made a good guess.

"In the Abbey. Were you there?"

She spoke a few words about that ceremony. It had all gone off marvellously, though it must have been a great strain on the King, she thought.

"How did it strike the American mind?"

"My democratic instincts were submerged for a time," he answered. "I wallowed in its romance and colour. I even forgot Mrs. Simpson and a young man named Edward."

"I didn't," she said, "I was haunted by them. But all that belongs to the past. Long live King George!"

John raised his hat as though in church.

"Rule, Britannia!" he said.

Anne glanced at him suspiciously and gave him a friendly warning.

"Now don't be too American or I shall quarrel with you! No back-chat about the Royal Family or stories about Mr. Baldwin and the Archbishop in the style of *Cavalcade*. I'm feeling very patriotic at the moment. I think the Coronation was too beautiful for words, and I'm proud of the English people. They behaved like angels."

"I agree," said John hurriedly. "I'm ready to agree with almost everything you say for the next three quarters of an hour."

"Less five minutes," said Anne, accepting his hand when he helped her out of the taxi at Princes Gate within a short walk of the tea-house in Kensington Gardens.

It was pleasant there, sitting at a white-clothed table on the grass where other people were taking tea. Anne fed the sparrows, and a fat pigeon which waddled round with one eye cocked for the next crumb.

"This is almost as good as the Casina delle Rose," said John. "The only difference is that the sky is not so blue and the sun is not so warm."

It was unfortunate that he had had to sneeze once or twice because of that little whisper of the north-east wind.

For a time they exchanged news of personal affairs. Anne was going to Berlin to see David. He had been knocked edge-

wise, poor boy, by the affair with Teresa Grandini. Frank was doing better with his garage because of the number of visitors for the Coronation. John described his visit to his home in Massachusetts and mentioned that he was looking for a house, having persuaded his mother and Judy to come to England for a year or two.

It was towards the end of half an hour, which seemed like two minutes, that Anne remembered an unfinished conversation on a telephone in Rome.

"What was it you wanted to say?" she asked. "I seem to remember you had something very particular to say to me but couldn't do it over the telephone."

John's face flushed for a moment, but he smiled at her under his felt hat with a turned-down brim to keep the sun out of his eyes.

"I guess you know exactly what I wanted to say," he told her.

She hadn't the least idea, she told him. "Was it pleasant or unpleasant?"

"I was going to make a fool of myself," said John. "I was going to tell you that I was crazy about you, and that I wanted to offer you my heart and hand together with my salary as a reporter on the *New York Observer* and a small bank balance in the Guaranty Trust."

Anne raised her eyebrows and looked at the last strawberry on her plate.

"I call that pleasant," she said. "I don't see why you should call it making a fool of yourself. It's the thing any woman likes to hear, especially over the telephone."

John couldn't get the point of the last words.

"Why especially over the telephone?"

"Because it doesn't sound too serious. Because it need not reveal a maidenly blush. Things spoken over the telephone on the spur of the moment are not used in evidence against one."

"What would you have answered?" asked John, "if I had

said something of that kind, with perfect sincerity and even desperate emotion?"

Anne considered this for a moment with that smile playing round her lips.

"I should have said I'm sorry you're crazy about me, John. Hadn't you better go and see a doctor or a psychoanalyst? Why should I make you crazy?"

John pushed his felt hat back and leaned forward with his arms on the table.

"You're playing with words," he said. "When an American says he's crazy about a girl he means he's in love with her. I'm in love with you, Anne."

"No, I don't think so," she answered lightly. "Didn't you tell me more than once that I was arrogant and snobbish and reactionary and undemocratic and almost all the things that you detest? I don't see how you can be in love with me really."

"I want to tell you," said John, "before you slip away from me in less than a quarter of an hour. You keep on slipping away into your own world. You don't give me a decent chance. But I want to tell you before you go that I don't care two hoots whether you're arrogant, or snobbish, or reactionary, or undemocratic, because I think you're the most beautiful thing on earth, and I'm just—well, I'm just crazy about you!"

He tried to take her hand for a moment across the tea-table in Kensington Gardens, to the great interest and secret delight of a nursemaid with two golden-haired children at the next table.

Anne withdrew her hand after a decent interval to show there was no ill-feeling.

"It's awfully sweet of you," she said. "And of course I appreciate it very much. But you really shouldn't think me the most beautiful thing on earth, because it isn't true, you know. I'm just the ordinary type of English wench. I can't compete with one of your film stars."

"Of course," said John, "I know what's in your mind. And I know that you're perfectly right. That's what makes this conversation extremely futile."

"Tell me," said Anne. "What do you read in my mind?"

John gave a demonstration of thought-reading.

"You're thinking that this damn-fool American is impudent enough to think that he has the right to fall in love with Lady Anne Ede, daughter of the Earl of Stanfield. An American reporter—a low newspaper fellow—dares to make love to a daughter of the Plantagenets, who wore feathers in her hair at the Coronation of George VI. He ought to be put in his place, which is pretty low down. That's what you're thinking, Anne, and I don't blame you, because it's entirely justified."

Anne laughed quietly.

"That's very funny!" she said. "Do you honestly believe that I think like that? If so, it shows how little you know about me and how crazy you are about someone who doesn't exist—a figment of your imagination."

"How am I wrong?" he asked urgently.

"Perhaps you'll find out one day," she answered. "We'll go on being friends when we meet in odd places. Shall we?"

It didn't seem good enough to him. It was in a way a dismissal. She would only see him now and then in odd places.

"Does that mean you turn me down?" he asked. "Does it mean I haven't a look in because I don't belong to your set and you have no more use for me than you have for a taxi-driver who takes you from Knightsbridge to Kensington?"

He spoke bitterly for a moment.

Anne threw some more crumbs to the greedy sparrows and then looked at her wrist-watch.

"Sorry, John," she said. "I shall have to be going."

She touched his hand for a moment across the table.

"Don't be silly," she said. "I'm glad you like me so much. There's nothing in that social set business that seems to worry you—at least not much. But I should be all wrong

in your life if you wanted to go as far as that. We belong to different worlds. We have different ideas. We should never see things in the same way. You're so very American and I'm so very English!"

"There's nothing in that," said John. "Believe me. I'm English too if it comes to that. There were Bartons in England as far back as Domesday Book. One of them fought at Agincourt with King Harry, or if he didn't he ought to have done. We'd help to build a bridge across the mill-pond. I'd like to show you my old home in Massachusetts. The American folk would fall in love with you. And American husbands are pretty good and let themselves be trampled on. I'd make a good American husband."

"You're sweet, John," said Anne. "But you're very alarming. And I don't want to trample on you. I rather want a taxi."

He hailed a taxi for her outside the gardens and drove with her to a house in Hans Crescent. On the way he was contrite.

"I've been making a fool of myself."

"Not at all!" she told him. "But we really don't know each other much, do we?"

"I want to know you better," he pleaded. "You won't let me. Anyhow, I love you, and, anyhow, I'm going on loving you. What are you going to do about that?"

"I'll wait and see," said Anne evasively.

Outside the house in Hans Crescent he gave his hand to her again and she held it for a moment.

"I'm sorry to seem so chilly," she said with a laugh. "I'm not really. It's my English mask. Do you remember?"

They had talked once about English masks.

"Take it off for a moment," he pleaded. "Let me see the real you."

She raised her hand to him and ran up the steps of a big house. It was opened by an elderly butler.

Before going in she turned and kissed her hand to him.

For an instant he saw her with her mask off. She had come alive for a moment.

John had missed his chance, he thought, by the width of a door in an English square. It had a brass knocker, and he was inclined to hammer on it and say, "There's a lady inside. I want to kiss her and she wants to be kissed."

He was afraid of the butler.

XXXII

It was Peter Langdon and his wife who found a furnished house for the Barton family, within three doors of their own, in that row of old-fashioned dwellings called St. Leonard's Terrace.

It was an eighteenth-century house with twentieth-century additions, including two bathrooms and central heating. It had three storeys and the dining-room was nicely panelled. There was a back yard—a narrow strip much frequented by cats—and a front garden, about as large as a fair-sized carpet, in which stood a Cupid in stone somewhat the worse for wear, and at least twenty geraniums in full bloom. The furniture was old-fashioned and dated from the early-Victorian period, which John found amusing and not too hideous, though he decided to enrich it by two or three arm-chairs in which the Barton family might take their ease.

One day he spent three hours with Mrs. Langdon and her son deducing the character and history of the previous occupants of this house by certain clues and signs. Young Paul was rather good at the game.

"Your predecessors," he announced, "had a grandmother who married one of Queen Victoria's equerries, who asked her to be his wife at the Crystal Palace, and afterwards fell in love with a lady of the music-halls called Totty Trumpington."

"Now, how do you know that?" exclaimed John, astounded at this information. "You've only been in this room two minutes, my lad!"

Paul Langdon accepted this compliment modestly.

"It's easy!" he said. "Over that piano is a portrait of Queen Victoria signed with her own hand. She used to give Christmas presents in that form to equerries and junior members of the Household staff who were grievously underpaid. Over that sofa—upon which no human being could rest with any comfort—is a print of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, and if you look in the right-hand corner you will see the words 'In memory of our happiest day' written in a schoolgirl hand. In that book which I happened to take down from the third shelf there's a photograph of a girl in tights with fat legs. It's inscribed to the honourable and adorable Jack with love from Totty. You'll notice that it was concealed in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, which no woman has ever read—the safest hiding-place for a conscience-stricken husband in Victoria's golden age."

"The lad is a wizard!" exclaimed John with real admiration for this *tour de force*.

"I can tell you something else," said Mrs. Langdon with dancing eyes, which made her look too young to be the mother of this tall son.

"Don't make it too wild, Mother," said Paul warningly. "We shall insist on good evidence."

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," said Mrs. Langdon. "The adorable and honourable Jack, having been reduced in fortune by horse-racing and other dissipations, was abandoned by his wife, who ran off with the curate of St. Peter's, Eaton Square, who became a missionary in China."

"Proofs!" demanded her son sternly.

Mrs. Langdon reminded her incredulous son and the future owner of the house—on a three years' lease subject to repairs—that one room was hung with coloured prints of racehorses. In the drawing-room was an old photograph of St. Peter's, Eaton Square, in the 'sixties, and in one of the top bedrooms was a faded photograph of a clergyman with side-whiskers standing by the side of a pretty little woman among a group of Chinese students.

"You have only to put two and two together," she said, before she laughed at this imaginative romance.

More recent inhabitants had given themselves away. The drawer of a roll-top desk was stuffed with bills and letters beginning, "Dear Sir, May we remind you . . ." In one of the wardrobes was a pair of dancing-slippers much worn. On the dustbin in the yard was a broken cocktail-shaker.

"The Rake's Progress!" said young Paul. "Most reprehensible! I fear there are unfortunate vibrations in this house."

"No," said Mrs. Langdon seriously. "I believe they're good vibrations. I believe people laughed here and were happy. I believe they loved music and filled the house with melody. I believe that some time in the eighteenth century pleasant people came here to play on violins and 'cellos and that young people danced on these old boards."

"Let's make a few new vibrations," suggested John in his practical way. "Won't you play something on that piano?"

Mrs. Langdon sat down at the piano and touched its notes.

"Don't make it too sloppy, Mother!" pleaded Paul. "Keep it bright! I don't want our American friend to burst into tears over 'My Coal-black Mammy' or 'Way Down Upon the Swanee River'."

She played "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" and then said, "Sing, Paul. You know the words."

He knew the words and sang them in a good young baritone with real charm, and quite unaffectedly, while John stood watching them and listening.

"That's fine!" he said when they had finished. "Those vibrations are good. They'll give a blessing to the house."

"These Americans!" exclaimed young Paul. "How they wallow in sentiment! They call themselves hardboiled, but they melt at the first reference to mother-love or platinum blondes. If ever I meet a Chicago gunman I'll disarm him by singing 'I Saw Stars'."

John didn't resent this sarcasm, as he might have done earlier in his English adventure. He had taken a great liking to this young man and had gone up to see him at Oxford, where he had attractive rooms in St. John's College. Paul had invited a group of undergraduates to meet his American guest and they had been a nice crowd, he thought, not quite so tough as some of his own group at Harvard, but manly and good-mannered. Oxford had put its spell on him, though his critical eye had not been impressed by some of the undergraduates, who sloped around in flannel trousers, looking sloppy and round-shouldered. They were not so husky as Americans of their own age, he had thought, until he went down to the boats and saw some fine-looking specimens of brawn and muscle being pulled into shape by a rowing-coach, who roared at them through a megaphone.

"What's the political slant in Oxford now?" he had asked Paul in his rooms. "Are they interested in the international situation and the rival ideologies?"

Paul had shrugged his shoulders, and given his answer with a laugh.

"Eighty-five per cent have no political convictions whatever, and don't care a damn either way. Twenty-five per cent talk hot air about these things, go to Union debates, and are mostly on the Extreme Left, which they think, or pretend, is the only place for high intelligence. Most of them, of course, are half-wits, or half baked. I don't have much truck with them, as I find them very tiresome."

For some reason he had taken a liking to John Barton and came round to his rooms sometimes in the evenings or invited him round to his father's house to meet some of his Oxford friends, who drove up in a variety of cars, some of them very smart and some of them looking as if they had been rescued from the scrap-heap. These undergraduates read Peter Langdon's novels with admiration and seemed to regard him as the best interpreter of contemporary life. He was extraordinarily shy with them, but liked to have them around

and enjoyed their conversation, which was rather wild at times.

John listened-in and found them interesting in his pursuit of knowledge regarding the mysteries of English character. They were bewildered, he thought, about life and their immediate future, which, as they hinted sometimes, might be interrupted by a European war. They had no faith whatever in their political leaders, and some of them had grave doubts about the virtues of democracy, if any. One or two of them were attracted by an extreme type of pacifism as interpreted by a popular preacher named Dick Sheppard. They were excited intellectually by the works of Aldous Huxley, which they found poisonous but thought-provoking. They talked a lot, laughed a lot, and smoked innumerable cigarettes. But they had charming, easy, and unaffected manners, and John Barton, observing them from the American angle of vision, liked their deference to Paul's mother, who had a laughing way with them. He was amused to see how they hovered around her when she was serving coffee and were pleased to wait on her.

John was glad to think that he would have this English home life so close to him—three doors away—when he shifted from his rooms in Burton Court to the little house in St. Leonard's Terrace. That was going to happen before long. The old house in Massachusetts had been rented to some Boston folk who would use it mostly at week-ends, and for a young family who liked riding and country sports. Mrs. Barton and Judy were due to arrive in another month, and John looked forward to their coming with some emotion. He had done one master-stroke of organization. Mrs. Pockett, who looked after him like some benevolent foster-mother, had agreed to hand in her notice at Burton Court and come to St. Leonard's Terrace as cook and housekeeper. Her niece, Lizzie, was prepared to come as parlourmaid. One of the great problems of English life—the servant question—had been solved by American diplomacy.

"I've always been 'appy with you, Mr. Barton," said Mrs. Pockett, "and there's nothing I won't do for them as treats me fair. Mind you, I'm not a fancy cook or one of them 'ussies who flirt with the master when the missus ain't looking. What I lacks in beauty I makes up in 'ard work."

"Mrs. Pockett," said John solemnly, "you're a jewel! And as long as England has a Queen Mary and a Mrs. Pockett all goes well with England. That's my earnest conviction."

"And you're not far wrong, young man," said Mrs. Pockett. "Me and Queen Mary have much in common. I always wear 'er style of 'ats, and we're both old-fashioned women what don't stand no nonsense from anybody. And now what about a nice cup o' tea?"

To Mrs. Pockett a nice cup of tea was an infallible cure for all maladies of mind and body, for refreshment after toil, and for that sense of comfort and peace which soothes the human spirit.

She performed heroic labours in getting the house ready for John's mother and sister, and often he found her down on her knees scrubbing the floorboards or using a prodigious amount of elbow-grease in polishing the old furniture, dusting the books, and beating the carpets. She was a woman of sixty, and in his mind he saluted her for indomitable energy. In a higher sphere, he thought, she could have stood up to the dictators.

The house was fresh and sweet on the day his mother and Judy arrived in London on the boat-train from Southampton. The lights were burning in every room, regardless of expense. He had gone round to a florist in Sloane Street and bought a great bunch of chrysanthemums, which he had arranged with an eye to artistic effect. Katherine Langdon had had a last look round and brought in some home-made cakes. But at the eleventh hour John had cold feet. Supposing his mother or Judy should hate this little old house in Chelsea? Supposing they could not bear to live with its early-Victorian furniture and those old prints on the wall? Supposing his

mother—very susceptible to psychic influences—found the vibrations sinister or unhappy?

When he embraced his mother and Judy on the platform at Waterloo, where they stood in the midst of the luggage, all his misgivings had become acute, and on the way to Chelsea, in a taxicab heavily laden with trunks, he expressed his anxiety.

"It's an old-fashioned house," he explained. "I'll be terribly downcast if you don't approve of it."

Judy had shining eyes which he noticed even in the darkness of the taxicab as they drove through the London streets on a rainy night which blurred the light of the lamps shining on the wet pavements.

"I shall approve," said Judy. "If it's only a dog-kennel I shall crawl into it quite happily. Oh, John, it's wonderful being back in London again . . . London!"

She spoke the word as thought it were Paradise.

"I'm sure it's going to be very nice, John," said Mrs. Barton. "The only thing I'm worrying about is whether the sheets are aired."

"Dry as a bone!" said John. "Mrs. Pockett saw to that. She sees to everything. She's the ace of London charladies."

Judy's ecstasy when she went over the house was John's reward, and he was reassured by his mother's more moderate verdict.

"I think I'm going to be happy in this house, John."

It was extremely annoying to him that within three weeks of their arrival he was jerked out of home life in London by a cable from his New York office instructing him to go to Berlin to interview Adolf Hitler and write a series of articles on the economic conditions of Germany.

XXXIII

KATHERINE LANGDON's sister had married a German officer who had been a prisoner at Donington Hall in England during the last year of the War and afterwards had come back for a year or two in the German Embassy under Herr Stahmer. It was to their address that he went shortly after his arrival in Berlin, where he put up at the Hotel Adlon, Unter den Linden.

On his first morning in Berlin, which was a Saturday, he had been awakened early by the sound of drums and bugles, and from his bedroom window he had watched a procession of Hitler Youth marching off to some parade; and then he was called to the window again by the music of a military band and looked down upon a body of troops marching in steel helmets. Later in the day, when he took his first walk in Berlin, he saw more battalions of marching youth close enough to study their faces and physique. They looked rather splendid, he was bound to admit. Carrying many banners, these boys had a fine bearing, though they looked rather grave and solemn. There was nothing the matter with their bodies, well set up and sturdy. No sign of under-nourishment, he thought, though American newspapers gave the impression that Germany was short of food. Some of them, perhaps, looked rather pale and overstrained, but if so they were exceptions. In the mass they were fine specimens of German boyhood, and for a moment there came into John's mind the remembrance of a crowd of English boys, somewhat older than these, whom he had seen in London. They had been lined up in a queue at midnight near the Admiralty Arch

waiting for a free meal. He had been shocked at the sight of them, weedy, undernourished, and degenerate. They might have been the better for a little drill and discipline, though as an American he hated drill and discipline.

These German boys looked fine. He had to admit that grudgingly, being hostile to the Nazi régime. But what was happening to their minds? What kind of mentality was being produced by all that Nazi propaganda, with its gospel of blood and race and its suppression of free speech and free ideas?

He studied the faces of the people in Berlin. Some of the older people looked grave and worried, but that couldn't be said of the younger crowds. There was a mass of them in the Potsdamerplatz surging into the big railway station. They were going for some country excursion, and the boys were in shorts with packs on their backs. The girls, in white frocks with bare arms, also carried packs, and did not seem to heed the burden of them. They were laughing and shouting. Some of them were singing. They didn't appear to be suffering from brutal oppression or intolerable tyranny. On the contrary, it looked as though they were out for a good time and had no grudge against life.

These first impressions of Berlin were surprising to an American who had gained his knowledge of Germany from newspaper reports dramatizing the misery of the German people under the rule of Hitler. He had expected to find them cowed and sullen, but looking at them with honest eyes he could not write them down as that, at least as far as any first impression went. He had read a lot about religious persecution and had the idea that Christian worship had been disallowed, so that he was astonished to see a big congregation pouring out of a church at the far end of Unter den Linden opposite a big building which he knew from his guide-book to be the Kaiser's Palace. There was red carpet down the steps of the church and he waited for a moment or two to see what was going to happen. What happened was that a figure dressed in purple with a purple skull-cap came down the steps

and raised a hand in blessing to the crowd outside, which shouted, "Hoch! Hoch!"

John spoke to a man whom he recognized as one of his fellow-countrymen with a lady by his side standing near him.

"What do you know about that?" he asked.

"It's the Papal Nuncio," he was told. "This is a Roman Catholic church. The Hedwigkirche."

"That's surprising," said John. "I was led to believe that the Nazis were up against Christianity and that all the churches were closed."

"Not yet!" said the American with a laugh and a quick glance over his shoulder. "Just arrived in Berlin?"

John nodded.

"I'm getting my first impressions."

His fellow-countryman, who looked a little like Herbert Hoover, gave him a friendly smile.

"I've been here for three years and I can't size things up yet. I'm not a hundred per cent sure about anything except that these people have a great man to lead them."

"In what direction?" asked John.

"Ah!" said his companion dryly. "I'd like to know."

He raised his hand and moved away with his wife as the crowd outside the church began to disperse.

Katherine Langdon's sister lived in a street which the hall-porter of the Adlon had pointed out to John on a large-sized map. It was off a long avenue called the Kurfürstendamm, which seemed to be like the Piccadilly of Berlin. Having time to spare, John walked that way through the Tiergarten, which corresponded with Hyde Park, London, or Central Park, New York, but was more spacious and wooded. Down the glades strolled German husbands and wives with or without children. A young man and woman were making love on one of the stone benches in the Siegersallee lined by marble statues of German heroes.

John remembered that Anne Ede had spoken about the Tiergarten as a pleasant place and suggested that one day she

might meet him there. He wondered if by any chance she were staying with her brother David.

He walked along the Kurfürstendam looking into the shop windows and watching German people who sat outside some of the cafés. There were many Jews strolling up and down. They were unmistakable to an eye familiar with their racial brethren in New York. He watched several groups of them going through the swing doors of a restaurant called Kempinski. Most of the shop-fronts bore Jewish names and seemed to be carrying on their business. It was difficult to reconcile this with his belief that Jews dared not show themselves in the daylight and had mostly been hunted out of Berlin. Perhaps it was another case of "Not yet!", as his fellow-countryman had remarked about the Christian churches.

"One can't get at the exact truth through the Press," he thought, and as a newspaper man he felt discouraged. Were his own articles so lacking in a truthful interpretation of facts? Perhaps it was the fault of the headlines. They summarized everything sensationally. They allowed of no half-tones. In Rome he had been told by a little Italian lady that the American mind did not admit of half-tones and saw things only in black and white. Because the Nazi creed was hostile to Christianity they conveyed the impression that Germany had become a God-less State. They jumped too far ahead. Because of Hitler's furious hatred of Jews and the expulsion of the Jewish professional classes they led their readers to believe that all Jews in Germany had been killed or exiled. The process was more gradual than that, it seemed. Here were Jews still alive, though beyond all doubt they were living under a constant menace. He watched some of these Jewish faces. They didn't look gay. He met the eyes of one of them—a tall, haggard man with a pointed beard—and he saw a brooding tragedy in them.

Katherine Langdon's sister lived in an apartment in the Tauenzienstrasse, four floors up. She was the wife of Friedrich von Altendorf, a tall, delicate-looking man with a pale face and

rather sunken eyes, which lighted up now and then with humour. They had received a letter from Mrs. Langdon saying that he would arrive.

"Katherine has often written about you," said Frau von Altendorf. "We seem to know you already, Mr. Barton."

"I should be happy to be of service to you," said her husband in perfect English. "How long are you staying in Berlin? It will be a great pleasure for us to show you something of German life."

"Tell us first about my dear Katherine," said Frau von Altendorf. "How is my brother-in-law and the handsome Paul?"

She had a family likeness to her sister, though she looked a little older and more worn with life. But she had the same modelling of face and the same timbre of voice.

"We have a son about Paul's age," said her husband. "He is doing his Arbeitsdienst—that is to say his service in a labour camp before taking his degree in the University of Berlin."

John noticed that Frau von Altendorf gave a slight sigh.

"Paul will be spared that ordeal," she said. "English boys are lucky. They escape all that."

Her husband glanced at her for a moment and then smiled.

"It's pretty hard," he said, "but Hans is strong enough to stand it, and it makes him more strong and healthy. He is becoming a young giant, with muscles of steel. His mother worries about him too much."

Margaret von Altendorf admitted that she worried. For the first three months the boy had found the work too hard, especially having to get up at dawn and go out into mist-laden fields, which had given him bronchitis.

"I'm not the only mother in Germany who worries about her son," she said. "The discipline is too hard. The boys are being overstrained. Some of them are not properly fed. They go down with pneumonia and tuberculosis."

Her husband shook his head and laughed nervously.

"Only the delicate lads. After all, it's a healthy out-of-door life and the majority of the boys like it," he said. "You must admit that, my darling. Hans tells us so constantly."

John stayed talking to them on that first visit for nearly an hour, and did not get very deep into serious problems. He was aware that Friedrich von Altendorf, that delicate-looking man, evaded some of his questions and kept the conversation on a light note—his recollections of England, his experiences as a prisoner of war, his great admiration for the novels of Peter Langdon, his love of English country life. Several times he seemed uneasy when his wife made a criticism, however mild, of the Nazi régime.

"Nothing is quite perfect in this world," he remarked. "Any intellectual Germans will admit that mistakes have been made and that we must be patient for a time until there are relaxations of the present rules and regulations. After all, this is still a new régime, and we must give Hitler credit for great achievements. There are no unemployed in Germany. A great deal has been done for the working classes. You should see something of our *Kraft durch Freude*—Strength through Joy—Mr. Barton. It's a wonderful organization!"

Just as John was about to take his leave a young girl entered the room and brought with her a sense of vitality and fresh air. She was in gymnasium kit and stood straight and slim, a fine young figure of German girlhood, with gold-spun hair, cut short like a boy's, and eyes as blue as forget-me-nots. She was unaware as she dashed into the room that a stranger was present, and flung her arms round her mother's neck with a demonstration of affection. Frau von Altendorf spoke a few words in German to her and she turned with a moment's shyness, which flushed her face, to give something like a half-curtsy—a dip of the knee—to this tall young American.

"This is my daughter Anna," said Frau von Altendorf.

John had heard of her from Katherine Langdon. She had been over in England for a few weeks with her brother Hans and stayed with the Langdons in their Chelsea home.

After that moment's shyness she was quite at ease, and spoke English with only a very slight accent.

"Have you seen Paul lately?" she asked. "How is he getting on at Oxford?"

John gave her news of Paul and told her that they were very good friends.

"We quarrelled abominably," said Anna with a laugh. "I'm all for Hitler, of course, and couldn't make him understand. He thinks that all Nazis are brutes, and that Germany is groaning under an intolerable tyranny!"

"Isn't that so?" asked John. "I'm afraid that I share Paul's point of view."

She opened her eyes rather wider and stared at him with a look of surprised horror.

"But how can you think so? How long have you been in Germany?"

"I've read *Mein Kampf*," said John, evading the answer to her last question. "I've read quite as much as I want to about the Nazi creed and its results. I confess they don't appeal to me."

"But *Mein Kampf* is a wonderful book!" cried Anna. "It contains the whole philosophy of the Führer. It is by all the ideas in *Mein Kampf* that Germany has grown so strong and so happy after all the years of misery."

"I must have read Hitler's book without understanding it," said John, smiling at this seventeen-year-old girl. He didn't want to argue with her. It was best to treat her as a child with an undeveloped mind.

Herr von Altendorf spoke quietly as Anna stood behind him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"The young people," he said, "have a great hero-worship for the Führer. They think he is above all criticism, whatever little mistakes may be made by some of his subordinates. And German youth is certainly happy in the mass. National Socialism appeals to them particularly, of course, because it holds out great promises, and appeals to the loyalty and

devotion of youth for its ideals of service, and, if necessary, sacrifice for the Fatherland."

"Well done, Father!" cried Anna in her marvellously good English. "Very nicely said. All my eloquence at the dinner-table has not been in vain!"

She turned with a smile to John Barton and explained the situation.

"Of course, our parents are not such good Nazis as our own generation. We have to educate them now and then. They can't be expected to adopt a new system with perfect understanding, because, of course, they cling to the past—poor dears!—and are too old to change all their habits of mind."

Her mother laughed for a moment.

"You see," she said to her guest, "that is how we are put in our place by our own children."

"Well, Mother," said Anna, "you know that I have the greatest difficulty with you! It's all because you are English, as I've told you so often. The English have such funny ideas about liberty as part of their tradition. They seem to think that liberty comes before food and clothing and happiness and service. The English think it nice that their starving people should be satisfied with having their democratic liberty to be lazy and dirty and never do a thing to serve their country, or discipline themselves."

"Anna!" said her father severely. "I don't like to hear you criticize England. It hurts your dear mother and myself."

The girl was contrite, and moved swiftly across the room to kneel by her mother's side and put one arm round her.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mother! I didn't mean to be beastly. You know I love England, to which I belong with half my blood and half my heart."

"And yet you are always finding fault with it, Anna," said Frau von Altendorf. "You're very naughty sometimes in that way. I suppose you can't help it. All you young people are stuffed with propaganda from morning to night."

"It's never unfriendly to England," protested Anna.

"We're only sorry about England, that she is so fond of Jews, and abuses our Führer for his wanting to make Germany a noble nation. We want to be friends with England. We want England to be true to herself. When the English give us back the colonies we shall have no cause of quarrel with them. After all, they are our cousins. They have our good German blood."

"Anna!" cried Frau von Altendorf with a laugh in which there was impatience and vexation. "For goodness' sake stop talking like Dr. Goebbels or Baldur von Shirach! I'm so tired of all that!"

"But it's the truth, Mother," Anna assured her solemnly.

John rose again to take his leave and this time departed, but not before he had invited Herr von Altendorf and his English wife to dine with him one night.

XXXIV

He was taken in hand by some young officials of the Ribbentrop Bureau in the Wilhelmstrasse, who seemed delighted to show him some of the social work and activities of the Nazi régime. They started work on him early in the morning, rang him up before he had shaved, and had a powerful car outside the Adlon before he had finished breakfast.

With German efficiency and thoroughness they showed him the working of the Winter Help organization from A to Z, and he had to admit that for a nation-wide system of relief among the labouring classes it was remarkable. They stressed the point that it was not charity. It was, they said, to give the working folk a sense of having helping hands reaching out to them in time of sickness, or when a new baby arrived, or when a girl wanted a new frock or a pair of dancing-shoes, or when a waiter's uniform was getting shabby, or when a German family needed a bit extra in addition to a working wage. He saw the food supplies, the clothing depots, the repair shops, and watched the queues arriving to claim these benefits—artisans, shop-girls, working mothers. Every inhabitant of a house and tenement in Berlin was card-indexed, with full information as to family and individual incomes, work, health. So it was in every city and village of Germany, and done by a vast army of volunteer and unpaid workers.

John Barton thought back to what was happening in the United States regarding Mr. Roosevelt's schemes of relief for the wageless and hard-pressed. In spite of American drive and vast millions of dollars poured on the job he had to

admit that it was a long way behind German social organization. In four years they had eliminated unemployment, by some miracle of national energy and discipline not to be accounted for wholly, or even a great deal, by rearmament on a prodigious scale.

He spent an evening with one of his young guides—who had been three years in an English university and might have passed for an Oxford undergraduate—in seeing something of the movement called *Kraft durch Freude*, or Strength through Joy. It gave entertainment to old as well as young, and after visiting various recreation centres John was taken to the Volkstheater, where a vast audience watched a first-class performance of light opera, for which they paid the equivalent of sixpence. Every seat in the house was the same price, and people drew the number of their seats out of an urn, knowing their luck when they read its number. He had read about something of the kind in Soviet Russia.

"We get all the best talent," said his guide. "Our best actors and actresses give their services free for certain dates and programmes. You see, the Nazis, as you call us, are good socialists as well as good nationalists! Hitler's whole aim is to raise the standard of happiness among the German people.

John permitted himself one searching question.

"Will it raise their standard of happiness when their sons are sent to march to the trenches of the next war?"

His guide, that charming young man, looked startled for a moment.

"Unless we are attacked," he said hurriedly, "there will be no next war. Germany wants peace above all things. Hitler is dedicated to peace. He says so in every speech he makes."

"That's fine!" said John dryly. He did not believe it. Why all this intensive arming, this building of a mighty air force, this drilling, marching and military training, if peace were the goal?

His guide seemed to read his mind.

"You may think we are arming for aggressive purposes," he said. "Foreigners get that impression of us. They don't realize that it is for defence and not attack."

"Defence against whom?" asked John.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"We have many enemies. The democracies don't like us. France has a military alliance with Russia. England is allied with France. There may be a combination against us. We have to be strong. When we were weak we were kicked in the mud. We have had to regain our self-respect."

"Come and have a drink at the Adlon," said John good-naturedly.

He did not want to argue with these fellows except to draw them out. He had his own convictions, deep-rooted in the American idea of liberty and democracy. Nothing would alter them.

He was driven one morning to some of the labour camps in the neighbourhood of Potsdam after going to the headquarters of the Arbeitsdienst, or Labour Service, where two young guards armed with silver-shining spades saluted a number of Brownshirt officers who passed in and out. Suddenly he laughed aloud at the thought of what American field labourers would say to this kind of spade-work. But these young fellows who handled their spades like swords were well built and good-looking. Harvard would have cast an appreciative eye on their physique and form.

The labour camps were not unimpressive. They had well-built hutments surrounded by flower-beds and well-mown grass. There were flowers, he noticed, on the dining-tables. Everything was clean and spotless, and the Camp Commandants seemed to be of good type, like those fellows with the spades, and keen on their job. Outwardly there was nothing brutal about them, though he noticed that when they gave an order the lads under their command jumped to attention.

The young men who were doing their labour service

seemed cheerful about it. There was a lot of laughter when he called for any who could speak English and had a few jokes with them. They could all speak English. At least they could all answer simple questions. A few of them spoke remarkably well.

"Do you find this work too hard?" he asked one group.

"Too hard? What is that? The English might find it too hard, or the Americans. We are Germans!"

That was a bit of swagger.

One boy admitted that it was a strain at first, especially the early rising. But after two months or so one became hardened.

"It's good for one's body," he said, bending his arm and showing his muscles.

"Is it good for the mind?" asked John.

That question seemed to amuse them.

"We are not intellectuals!" said one of them. "We don't believe in an intellect divorced from the body. We aim at a reasonable harmony."

They looked well fed on the whole, though he saw some pasty and pimply faces among them. They seemed to get a fair amount of rest, and he visited one camp where they were all in the bunks for an hour's siesta after a long morning's work in the fields.

At one camp he asked for a young man named Hans von Altendorf, who was duly produced by the Commandant. He was a tall lad of eighteen or so with a distinct family likeness to Katherine Langdon in the set of the eyes and the shape of the mouth. John strolled about with him for ten minutes or so.

"Do you like this kind of thing?" he asked.

The boy smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not too bad. It's healthy if one can stand it. It makes one very fit, but of course it interrupts one's studies."

John chatted with him about the drill and discipline of German youth and then asked a question too abruptly.

"What's your idea about the next war? Do you fellows think it's coming?"

The boy looked startled.

"The next war?" he asked politely.

"Isn't your leader training you for it?"

Hans von Altendorf glanced over his shoulder.

"I hope not. I think not. There are very few of us who look forward to war with any pleasure. We know what happened in the last war. Our fathers have told us, and the next would be worse. German youth is for peace. Hitler, we believe, is for peace. Of course we should have to defend ourselves if we were attacked."

"Well, I hope it won't happen," said John, who believed it would happen—before very long, if he read the signs of the times with any knowledge of truth. But he didn't want to cross-question this boy too closely. It was hardly fair, he thought, and might lead him into trouble.

He spoke of Paul Langdon, this lad's cousin, and saw his eyes light up.

"Paul and I are good friends," he said. "Of course he doesn't understand the German standpoint, but we agree to differ. I should love to be with him at Oxford. It must be a very good life there."

For a moment he looked across the fields beyond this labour camp as though seeing Oxford as a shining vision.

"I'm half English," he said. "Perhaps that's why I love England so much. It's not so effete and decadent as some of us are taught to believe."

"You're taught that?" asked John curiously. He wanted to find out more about the teaching of the young minds in Germany, in the labour camps and schools.

Hans laughed before he answered.

"We get a lot of propaganda, of course. One has to discount some of it. But it's not hostile to England, and every German wants to be friends with England. The idea is that they're getting weak and don't want to defend their own possessions, and therefore are not justified in holding them."

"Perhaps there's some truth in it," said John thoughtfully.

As an American, he looked at England with critical eyes and much questioning. He was interested when this young German—half English—answered him with some emotion.

"I don't believe that! The English will never lose their heroic spirit. They're always best when they have their backs to the wall. They always win the last battle."

Presently he turned politely to his visitor.

"I'm afraid I must go now. We go out to the fields again."

XXXV

THERE was a restaurant in Berlin where John met a friendly crowd and heard a variety of opinions and facts, rumours and scandals which were amusing but unreliable. It was a place called "Die Taverne", in the Kurfürstenstrasse, and was the haunt, late in the evenings, of international journalists, actors, musicians, dancers and secret police. Free speech was allowed, and it was very free indeed, especially from American journalists, who did not trouble to lower their voices when criticizing the Nazi régime or telling humorous stories about General Goering and Dr. Goebbels. Perhaps this place was tolerated as a useful sounding-board for foreign opinion and popular rumour. Eleven o'clock at night was the best time to take a place at one of its tables, when the newspaper men had mostly ended their day's work and came here for sandwiches and coffee or alcoholic stimulant. John found himself in a group of English and American journalists with two or three Germans belonging to the "Partei", who laughed at the most outrageous stories and listened unperturbed to criticism of their own creed and propaganda.

The most amusing man at table, perhaps, was an American correspondent on a Chicago paper who became more eloquent at every drink and indulged in philosophical monologues which became a little wild and incoherent as the night progressed. He was of Irish descent and bore the name of O'Brien. Generally he sat next to an English newspaper man named Harrington, who had the usual English reserve but seemed to

get some entertainment out of O'Brien's Irish-American oratory.

"Berlin," said O'Brien one night, "is the headquarters of a modern Mohammed who is announcing a new gospel to the human tribes and will carry it across the world by force of arms—that is to say by bombing aeroplanes, heavy tanks, poison gas, thermite and power politics. The English and French, poor boobies, have not yet wakened up to this challenge against European civilization and the Christian tradition. They think it's only a difference between democracy and dictatorship. Believe me, brother, there's more in it than that! It's a declaration of war between Wotan and Christ."

"My dear O'Brien," said Harrington, the Englishman, "it's too early in the evening to talk stuff like that. Wait till you've had one over the eight."

O'Brien addressed himself to Barton, his fellow countryman.

"I want to put you wise about a few things, buddy. The first is that Adolf Hitler, who runs this country, is one of the greatest men in the world. Don't you let yourself be duped by newspaper guys into thinking that he's a little fellow who is used as a puppet by wire-pullers behind the scenes. They'll tell you he's a madman, or a sleep-walker, or a professional spellbinder, same as one finds in American rotary clubs. Get that right out of your head. This man Hitler is one of those fellows who get thrown up by humanity once in a thousand years or so—Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Attila, Ghengis Khan, Mohammed. His book, *Mein Kampf*, is a gospel as powerful as the Koran and as dangerous to other forms of faith. It's as full of high explosives as *Das Kapital*, by Karl Marx, which has cost the lives of millions. But Karl Marx was as harmless as the dove compared with Adolf Hitler, because Hitler is putting behind his creed all the power of disciplined armies, all the fanaticism of highly trained youth, and all the force of modern science directed to the instruments of slaughter."

"Have another sandwich, old man," said Harrington. "Eat something. You're exhausting yourself."

O'Brien ignored the plate of sandwiches, but drank a glass of brandy and ordered another.

"Johnny Barton," he said, "you're a thoughtful-looking guy, and you write for an important American paper. Take it from me that I'm giving you the real dope. What I'm telling you, brother, is the result of mental agony and intensive study. And I'm telling you that the Cross is challenged by the Swastika, and that Latin civilization, from which we derive our own, is menaced by the resurrection of the old pagan gods. Hitler is a throw-back to Wotan. He is the god of the Germanic folk, who came out of their dark forests to overthrow Rome. He will ride in his chariot—a German-made motor-car—over all the liberties which European democracies have fought for and struggled for during many centuries. He is out to destroy human intelligence, human tolerance, pity, mercy, charity, chivalry and all the Christian virtues. Mankind is on the move again as in the times of the racial torrents which invaded Europe from Asia. The Germanic race is on the move under a great Captain who will darken the very sky with his bombing aeroplanes and threaten the last strongholds of liberty with his gospel of race hatred and State worship and tyranny over individual rights. You think I'm drunk, Johnny Barton, and I am, but I'm inspired, for I have seen the truth."

"My dear O'Brien," said Harrington, in his mild English voice, "all this is very amusing, but very dangerous. Your words are overheard by two of Himmler's Blackshirts, who will report you to headquarters and have you taken over the frontier. And richly you'll deserve to lose your job. No newspaper man has a right to denounce a State to which he is accredited as a correspondent, especially in such wild and whirling words, all of which are fantastic and untrue."

"Untrue! Hell! Now what do you know about that?"

O'Brien was slightly disconcerted by this denial of his

argument, but laughed loudly and winked at John Barton across the table.

"Like most Americans," said Harrington, "you exaggerate your thesis and over-dramatize it. You think in headlines. You talk in double-ledged type."

O'Brien turned his shoulder on his critic and found a listener on his left, a Brownshirt officer who laughed at him from time to time.

Harrington continued his argument with John Barton.

"I'm against this Messianic stuff," he said. "Hitler seems to me very intelligent and astute apart from his racial theories. What he has done, step by step, is to undo the Treaty of Versailles. He has given the Germans their pride again. All this rearmament is to prevent Germany from being attacked by a combination of powers which include Soviet Russia and the French system of encirclement. He offered to limit his arms to the lowest level agreed to by other powers. We were foolish not to accept those offers when made. He offered a Four-Power Pact, which we refused because France clung to the Franco-Soviet alliance. In my opinion we've played our cards badly."

It was the same argument which John had heard in Rome from Henry Merivale.

"Can you trust Hitler to keep any pact?" asked John.

Harrington shrugged his shoulders.

"That seems to me the wrong attitude. You can't get far with any man if you let him know that you don't trust him. That kills all further conference and possibility of understanding. My experience has been that if you say to a man 'we trust you' he generally plays up."

"What about *Mein Kampf*?" asked John. "In the first line of it he makes it clear that he won't rest until he gets hold of Austria."

Harrington blew a wreath of smoke in a well-shaped ring.

"He wants the *Anschluss*; why not? It's natural and inevitable. He doesn't want to destroy Austrian independence."

"Are you sure of that?" asked John.

"Absolutely! All my German friends, some of them in close touch with Hitler, tell me that he will be satisfied with a closer political and economic arrangement with Austria and pledges himself to guarantee Austrian independence."

"I guess you know," said John.

Harrington had no doubt about his own knowledge.

"Besides," he continued in his quiet voice, "isn't there a considerable hypocrisy in the attitude of England and France towards Austrian independence? With the help of your President Wilson, if you'll allow me to remind you, Austria was cut into small pieces by the Peace Treaties. She could only exist by foreign aid. I don't call it independence when Dr. Dollfuss bought the support of Mussolini at the price of allowing Prince Starhemberg to rout out the Social Democrats and bombard the workmen's dwellings in Vienna."

"It's all too difficult for me," said John with a bewildered laugh. "This Europe is a patchwork quilt of race hatreds and political conflicts. My simple American mind just can't unravel its twisted threads. I had an idea that Dr. Dollfuss was a hero and martyr and the champion of democracy."

Harrington smiled at the simplicity of this confession.

"Not quite accurate! I liked the little man, but he had no use for democracy. His own people called him the Pocket Dictator, and he was pretty ruthless."

"What about his successor, whose name escapes me for the moment?"

"Schuschnigg," said Harrington. "The professor type, with a touch of the Spanish inquisitor. Austrian prisons are stuffed with Nazis and Social Democrats. He rounds up the Left and the Right with strict impartiality. One day there will be a bloody revolution between those two forces, and Schuschnigg will be shot like Dollfuss."

"Certainly you know," said John again. "I'm here to learn."

XXXVI

He learned other points of view in Berlin from newly made friends and from one well-informed young man whom he had met before in an English home and in the Eternal City. That was David Ede, now in the British Embassy in Berlin after his romantic and unfortunate friendship with a dark lady in Rome.

He came into the Adlon one evening with his sister Marjorie, that young girl whom John had first seen at Aldermere leading a lame horse. They were both in evening clothes, and John felt shabby in his lounge suit, which he hadn't changed after writing a despatch in his bedroom to the *New York Observer*. After a moment's hesitation he went over to this elegant young couple, who attracted the friendly eyes of elderly Germans taking coffee in the big lounge after dinner.

"Good evening," said John. "Should I be in the way if I joined you?"

"Not at all," said David. "Do, by all means. You know Marjorie."

He spoke as though it were not the least surprising to meet this American in Berlin. He would have spoken in exactly the same way if they had met in Outer Mongolia or the Gobi Desert.

Marjorie showed slightly more enthusiasm at this encounter, and reminded John of a certain fight outside his bedroom door at Aldermere when he had a wet sponge in his face.

"How's Lady Anne?" asked John presently.

"Oh, Anne's all right," said Marjorie. "She's doing a bit of huntin', but she threatens to come out in a week or two to

stay with David and get on with the good work of Anglo-German fellowship. She's gone dotty about Hitler and has fallen in love with the Nazis."

"I find it hard to believe," said John, shocked by this information.

Marjorie, who looked less of a tomboy in an evening frock with bare arms and full flounces, grinned across at him.

"Oh, I don't suppose she wants to marry any of them! Don't get nervous. It's purely a political attachment. She thinks England could learn a bit from Adolf. Discipline, duty, and all that kind of thing."

"Including Jew-baiting?" asked John.

"Oh, well, some of them have asked for it, haven't they?" said this slip of a girl with the eyes of a young fawn.

"They're human beings," said John. "Some of them have intelligence and genius. Jewish mothers love their babies. Don't you stand for civilization?"

Marjorie was surprised by this rebuke, grimly spoken.

"Hope I haven't dropped a brick?" she enquired. "I thought we were pure Aryans in this group. If you have a Jewish grandfather . . ."

John recovered his sense of humour. It was ridiculous of him to get angry with this young girl, who had only just got out of short frocks. How could he expect her to understand the tragedy of persecution or the agony of a hunted race?

"I'm of the old English stock," he told her. "But I believe in human decency, as I'm sure you do."

"I do," said Marjorie, "though I find it exceedingly difficult to draw the line between what is decent and what is indecent. David is shocked, for instance, if I show my legs too much in a drawing-room, but he's not in the least shocked if I put on a skin-tight slip and do a bit of sunbathing out of doors. All very difficult."

David intervened with his quiet laugh.

"Barton doesn't mean that kind of indecency, my child. He means human kindness and a civilized code."

"Oh, well, I'm all for it," said Marjorie carelessly. "And what about a spot of Benedictine, David? It warms up the cockles of one's heart."

David raised his finger to a waiter and ordered a Benedictine for Marjorie and a whisky for John.

"Do you find Berlin interesting?" asked John, turning towards him.

"I like Rome best," said David, and then for just a second a very faint wave of colour crept under his fair skin. He remembered that John knew about that unfortunate episode with an Italian lady, the indiscretion of a junior diplomat. But he went on speaking without an alteration of voice.

"Of course, this is the centre of interest in Europe. Germany is the great enigma. They're becoming very powerful. Alarmingly so, I'm afraid, in the air."

"And meanwhile," said Marjorie, holding up her glass of Benedictine and squinting through it, "our little lads in England prattle at their cocktail parties and sleep easy in their beds with the aid of an aspirin. I was talking to a young German airman yesterday, and he asked me why England didn't have some form of national service. Because, I told him, the youth of England prefers to watch football matches and put a bob on the three-thirty. He failed to understand me. He said it would be awkward for us if he was sent to bomb London one day with fifteen hundred other bombers. I agreed! He hoped it wouldn't happen because he liked the English. To which I said, 'Thank you kindly, young man.'"

David laughed as he sat in a deep chair of the Adlon lounge with his silk socks showing below his evening-dress trousers.

"Snooks," he exclaimed, "you're a dangerous sister for a junior diplomat! You talk too much."

"Oh, they think I'm just kind!" said Marjorie. "Little do they know that I should make a perfectly good spy and

lure all their secrets away by flirting with their bald-headed generals."

"You ought to be spanked," said David, glancing over his shoulder, but smiling at this outrageous girl.

No one was listening, and he talked more freely in answer to John's questioning.

Yes, he had met Hitler and was rather impressed. He had good manners at a tea-table and was curiously gentle in his way of speech. One couldn't believe it was the same man who spoke so harshly and stridently when he addressed a great crowd on public occasions.

"The future of the world," said David, "depends upon what's happening and going to happen in that man's brain. Nobody can give a guess. He works on intuition rather than on reason. He's a curious combination of mystic and realist. I'm inclined to believe in his sincerity, the sincerity of a man who's convinced that he's divinely guided."

"A dangerous prospect for other peoples," said John.

"German youth worships him," said David. "They're ready to die for him. It looks as though we must make friends with Germany or prepare for trouble. So far, as Marjorie suggests, we're not preparing."

"If these people like us why shouldn't we be friends with them?" asked Marjorie. "Certainly they seem to like me. When I walk down Unter den Linden it's quite embarrassing. Handsome young Germans and ugly old ones all give me the glad eye."

David laughed again at his young sister, whose verbal audacities shocked and amused him.

"I've had nothing but kindness since I've been in Germany," he told John presently. "The German people are all for friendship with England, and they mean it, I'm certain. It seems a pity that we should be at cross purposes."

"The German people, yes," agreed John. "But what about the German leaders?"

David touched John's foot with the point of his own shoe

and glanced towards a man who stood near them lighting his cigar.

"I'm afraid we're talking rather indiscreetly," he said quietly. "And Marjorie has a peculiarly penetrating voice. Shall we go and see a show somewhere? I know a rather amusing place in the Kurfürstendamm which is quite respectable."

XXXVII

THE Altendorfs were very hospitable to the friend of Peter Langdon and his wife. John saw a good deal of them from time to time and learned much from them about the anxieties and hopes of Germany under the Nazi régime. Friedrich von Altendorf was guarded at first, but gradually became more at his ease in talking on this subject to a foreigner. He had a profound adoration for Hitler, but was critical of some of the other leaders and did not favour some aspects of their propaganda and methods. What seemed to hurt him most was the suppression of free speech and newspaper censorship.

"We know little of what is happening," he said. "German newspapers print only what is supposed to be good for the people. It's useless to read them! We are kept in ignorance of what the outside world is thinking and doing. How can the German people form any judgment?"

He had no patience at all with the persecution of the Jews, although he argued that there had been too many Jews in control of the professions and cultural activities of Germany. But he detested all the hatred and abuse stirred up against this unfortunate race, which, he said, was not done with the approval of the German folk, who, in the mass, were kindly and humane. Nor was it looked upon with favour, he said, by the German Army, who had a better code of honour and self-respect.

On other aspects of Hitler's rule he spoke with an enthusiasm to which John, who was deeply prejudiced against all forms of dictatorship, listened with scepticism.

"Hitler," he said once, "has performed miracles. It is necessary to say that! The truth of it can only be known by those who lived in Germany through the post-war years, when we were flung into despair by defeat and broken under the Treaty of Versailles. The German people lost their pride and their hope. Inflation ruined us. The French invasion of the Ruhr put a great bitterness into our souls. Unemployment was like a plague. Our young men on the threshold of life had no work and no wages, and no hope ahead. Germany was divided into many parties, deeply and murderously hostile to each other, arming secretly for a bloody revolution. By some miracle—it was miraculous!—Hitler achieved his own revolution without bloodshed—almost without bloodshed. He came to power by the votes of the people. He united them for the first time in history. He lifted them out of the mud. He gave them work and wages. He gave to youth the most brilliant promises, which are not unfulfilled. German youth is exultant and full of spirit. Germany is no longer despised and humiliated. It is a great power again, dynamic in its energy, healthy, industrious, and disciplined. Those are very great benefits."

John put the American point of view, hostile to the Nazi creed.

"I'll take that all for granted," he said, in his blunt, outspoken way. "But what about the minds of all those healthy, disciplined boys and all these industrious people? Aren't they being taught a racial theory, which must lead inevitably to war against other peoples?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Altendorf. "They're taught to be proud of their race, but to recognize that other peoples have a right to their own national consciousness. Hitler has promised to be a leader of peace. The whole German people with few exceptions believe him."

"Well, I hope they won't be disillusioned," said John. "But what about all this intensive rearmament? German factories working day and night to turn out

big guns and bombing aeroplanes? Does that look like peace?"

For a moment Altendorf was silent. He seemed to be thinking very deeply.

"Sometimes I get worried," he admitted, "but it is Hitler's proud belief that Germany must be very strong in order to defend herself against many enemies."

"Who are they?" asked John curiously. "England certainly doesn't want to make war. France, I'm told, wants to avoid it at all costs."

Altendorf stared down at the tablecloth and paused for some while before he answered.

"That's perfectly true," he answered; "but the game of international politics is not so simple as all that. France is dominated by fear, and because of that fear wishes to thwart Germany's legitimate interests in order to prevent us becoming stronger. The French Foreign Office thinks only in terms of the Balance of Power and insists on establishing a hostile front against Germany. For that reason they made the Franco-Soviet Pact, and as long as that lasts Germany is menaced. Russia has not given up her purpose of Bolshevizing Europe. The Comintern is subsidizing Communist groups in every country, including England and France. They are influencing the Press through Jewish and revolutionary agents. Russia would be glad to see a war against Germany, and especially a war in which France and England would be involved. There are fifteen Communist organizations with their headquarters in Prague, working by underground methods, issuing false news and poison propaganda against Germany. England does not want to make war against us, that is true, but England is allied with France, and through France with Russia. The Little Entente leans to the side of France. Something might happen in Europe, some accident, some cause of quarrel, some explosion, which would bring those forces into action. In that case Germany would be gravely threatened. We are not so strong as we were in 1914, when we lost the war."

Suddenly he spoke with deep emotion.

"I am a man of peace! I fought in the last war and saw its horrors and its futilities. I am married to an English wife. I have a deep love for England, and to me it is inconceivable that we should ever fight the English again. That view is held by every veteran of the last war, and by the whole German people, including Hitler himself."

John switched off from this line of thought to another of a more abstract kind.

"We Americans," he said, "believe in liberty. We don't have to look over our shoulders when we speak about politics or religion or any other subject which turns up for discussion. Here in Germany a man who speaks too freely is put into a concentration camp. That's what gets our goat."

Altendorf shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no love for concentration camps. But you must remember that this is a new régime and therefore not so secure as such a Government as they have in England, based on the tradition of a thousand years. In England free speech may be allowed without danger to the State. A few rebels may be tolerated. The Nonconformist mind does not threaten to overthrow the State. But in Germany it is difficult to allow free criticism and free speech to Communists and revolutionaries who are still working underground and ready to use every murderous weapon. It would lead to a bloody revolution. For a time it is still necessary to endure certain repressive measures, including concentration camps, for political enemies of the State. I hope that time won't last much longer."

John refused to be convinced by this argument.

"It seems to me," he said, "that this State-worship and its call to blind obedience is a declaration of death to the individual soul. It stops the individual from thinking. He becomes a mere robot, or a termite ant."

Altendorf laughed uneasily, not liking this American bluntness nor this provoking criticism.

"I have heard," he said, "that mass production is not

unknown in the United States! Mass-produced clothes, mass-produced entertainment, mass-produced minds. Perhaps that is one of the penalties of modern civilization. Personally, I admit, I dislike it. I am an individualist. I recognize the necessity of free intelligence. But I would ask you to go around Germany talking to the people. I do not think you will find they have lost their individuality to any marked degree."

"Including the younger generation?" asked John. "All those marching boys, stuffed with propaganda by Dr. Goebbels?"

Altendorf flushed slightly and seemed to resent these pointed questions.

"I don't want to turn the tables," he said politely, "but I do not know from any evidence that I have that the intelligence of the American masses is much higher than that of the German people. Nor do they seem to be able to produce better results. Your American prisons, I am told, are not models of humanity. The poor whites in the United States do not seem to get enough food or wages for a decent livelihood. The cinema is not perhaps the most exalted form of propaganda for high and noble ideals! You have your lynching, your gangsters, your baby-stealers. Is it quite fair of visitors to Germany to turn their searchlight on what is open to criticism while ignoring certain weaknesses in their own system and all that is on the credit side of National Socialism?"

John saw that he had pressed the conversation too far on the political differences of outlook, and he made a good-humoured apology for this indiscretion, due, as he explained, to his insatiable desire for information.

This insatiable desire, as well as instructions from his New York office, led him to Munich, Nuremberg, and other German towns, which kept him away longer than he had intended from the little house in St. Leonard's Terrace, Chelsea, where his mother and Judy were eager for his return. Everywhere he went he found intense industry, and a people

remarkably cheerful on the whole under a system which demanded considerable sacrifice and unquestioning loyalty. There was no visible sign of discontent. Under an artificial system of finance, which seemed to work, they looked fairly prosperous and put up a good show. Restaurants and beer-houses and pleasure gardens were always crowded. German youth in its stadiums and playgrounds seemed to find life to their liking. These masses of boys and girls, singing, marching, laughing, did not look like the victims of tyranny or oppression. If they were they didn't seem to know it. It was obvious that they found a real joy in this mass comradeship and mass discipline, and mass competition in their sport and games. Behind the scenes, no doubt, there was poverty in little homes, needing constant economy, with no easy margin for German mothers and fathers. Everyone, down to the poorest working man, was taxed heavily on what he earned. The whole nation was being trained to avoid any kind of waste, even in bones or rags or newspapers, all collected for future use. There was undoubtedly an intense drive directed from above to control and discipline the whole nation in the service of the State by a constant propaganda which never slackened. It blared through loudspeakers in the streets. It was handed out by the Youth Leaders. It was pumped into the German mind by lectures, speeches and newspaper articles. For what purpose? Self-preservation? The desperate needs of national economy? Or for some purpose of world power?

Everywhere he went John Barton found kindness, friendliness and good-nature towards him as an American. He liked the people. Who could help liking them? They were a homely folk. They were good-mannered. They went out of their way to render him any little service. Youth Leaders and Camp Commandants were eager to answer his questions and show him their work. He found them all keen and enthusiastic and he seldom came across a brutal type. His visual impressions and his social experience were all favourable, disarming his prejudices and forcing him to admit, against his will, even,

that National Socialism was achieving something of which the democracies would have to take notice—a new pattern of life, dynamic energy, an efficiency of national organization and—was it possible?—an idealism directed towards the welfare of the masses. And yet, as an American, obstinate in intellectual allegiance to democratic ways, he could not go farther than that, and was convinced that behind this outward show of material achievement and national discipline there were mysterious purposes and powers. This efficiency, this discipline, to what end would it be directed by those in control? This loyalty to Hitler, how would it be used? These legions of singing youth, along what road would they be sent one day?

What was going on in the mind of that one man who had the destiny of these people in his grasp? When he retired to Berchtesgaden for inner communing, what vision came to him in his waking dreams? Was it a vision of peace and human brotherhood, or of war and death and terror? Those people round him—his chief of police, his diplomatic advisers, his propaganda minister, those who flattered and feared him, what words of counsel did they give him? What plans did they lay in front of him? Were they the blue prints of a nobler civilization, or the strategic plans of another Armageddon?

John Barton was unable to get in direct touch with this Leader of the German race. The interview could not be arranged. He had retired again to Berchtesgaden.

XXXVIII

ON his return to Berlin in the autumn of that year John met Anne in the tea-room of the Adlon. She had a pretty woman with her who looked amused when John went to their table and spoke with some emotion.

"Anne! . . . I feel like Dante when he met Beatrice on the bridge at Florence."

Anne too was certainly surprised, but gave him a friendly laugh.

"You don't look a bit like Dante. But it's very nice to see you again. David told me you were roaming round Germany."

She introduced him to her friend.

"Elisabeth von Metzen . . . Mr. John Barton, a friend of England, democracy and me."

John was still clasping Anne's hand, but he relinquished it to take the hand of Elisabeth von Metzen, who smiled up at him. She was young and fair and looked attractive in a little fur cap with a silver fox round her neck.

"Anne is losing faith in democracy," she said, in perfectly good English. "But I'm sure she'll never lose faith in her friends."

"Well said!" exclaimed Anne. "And wonderfully true. Sit down, John, and let me hear all your adventures since last we met."

"The last time we met," he reminded her, "was on a doorstep in a London square. You sent me a message with the tips of your fingers which I very much appreciated."

The colour on Anne's cheeks deepened for a moment, but she laughed at this remembrance.

"What was that mysterious message?" asked Elisabeth von Metzen curiously. "A secret signal?"

"Oh, very secret," said Anne. "Not to be revealed in the Adlon Hotel."

John put his long legs under the tea-table and made a complaint against Fate.

"I'm a terribly sad man. Every day when I was last in Berlin I looked for you in the Tiergarten. Now when I find you in the Adlon, where I happen to be staying, I have to go to London tomorrow morning. Is it Fate or misfortune?"

"Bad luck for me," said Anne. "I've only just arrived. What are we going to do about it?"

She didn't look broken-hearted, but he was glad she seemed a little sorry.

"You're going to dine with me this evening," said John firmly.

Anne glanced across the table to her friend Elisabeth, who laughed before she spoke to John.

"Anne has promised to dine with me and my brother, Helmut, in our little flat in den Zelten. We should be very happy if you would join us. It is just across the Tiergarten."

John wanted Anne to dine with him alone, but he made the best of a bad business and accepted the invitation.

"When Helmut goes to London," said Anne, "it will be nice for him to know Mr. Barton. He knows everybody in the newspaper world."

Elisabeth von Metzen thought that a fine idea.

"Yes, indeed. Especially as the English and American newspapers are rather critical of our poor Germany! Helmut may help to break down some of the misunderstanding."

John reserved comment on this point. He thought most of the misunderstanding was on the German side, but he decided not to say so. He had been rather too argumentative

with Friedrich von Altendorf and others, and he did not want to raise a controversy which would put him in a bad light with Anne. He was learning European diplomacy.

That evening at dinner he was not quite happy in spite of charming company. He was uneasy in his mind about Helmut von Metzen, the brother of Elisabeth. That young man was perhaps a little too charming. He was a tall, good-looking fellow of the aristocratic type, and had easy and unaffected manners with only a slight touch of formality now and then. Anne seemed to like him quite a lot, and John was stricken with an absurd jealousy. She was deep in conversation with this young German and talked enthusiastically about the great achievements of Hitler and all that he was doing for German youth.

"I wish to goodness," he heard her say, "that we had a Hitler in England! It would do some of our young slackers a bit of good. I'm all for putting them into labour camps and teaching them the value of work on the soil. What could be better for their souls and bodies?"

Helmut von Metzen laughed at her enthusiasm but disagreed with her on one point.

"I'm a perfectly good Nazi," he said, "but I don't think you want a Hitler in England, Lady Anne. Each country needs its own form of leadership and its own type of government. The English are great individualists, and would never submit to the discipline which comes naturally to the German mind, although for a time we abandoned it."

Anne argued with him vivaciously.

"The more I see of Germany the more I think England pays too big a price for individual liberty. I don't see the good of liberty if it refuses any form of service, or if it's liberty to stand on a soap-box and abuse one's own country. I think England could do with a little less liberty and a little more discipline."

She looked across at John and said: "Don't you agree, Mr. American?"

"No," he said, "I can't say I do."

Anne turned to Helmut and talked as though John were a long way off.

"I'm afraid I've shocked a perfectly good democrat. He comes from Massachusetts, where the Pilgrim Fathers landed to establish liberty in the New World and began by making a lot of laws to prevent people from enjoying themselves. Or am I wrong, John? My knowledge of American history is very weak."

"I dare say you're right," he answered, with just a hint of sulkiness. "But as far as I know contemporary Americans they don't believe in the suppression of free speech even if it is accompanied by spade drill in labour camps or the kindly discipline in concentration camps."

It was not very polite of him, and he saw Anne raise her eyebrows a moment so that he felt guilty and miserable for having spoken in that tone.

Elisabeth von Metzen, who sat next to him, laughed good-naturedly and disarmed him by her refusal to take offence.

"That is the American point of view," she said, "and I find it very reasonable. But we Germans are not very fond of our concentration camps and other forms of suppression. Unfortunately, we are not yet in a time of normal conditions. The Nazi régime is only four years old, Mr. Barton. It has to defend itself against secret enemies and many disloyal people who wish to overthrow it. I am told that even in the United States Communists are not allowed to land if they are likely to endanger the Constitution or disobey its laws. In Germany we have to defend the safety of the State against our revolutionaries, who, in many cases, are paid agents of Moscow."

"Exactly!" said Helmut. "England doesn't understand all the dirty work being done by people who call themselves Social Democrats, which sounds very nice and harmless to English ears. They're really international conspirators,

subsidized by Russia to stir up another war and overthrow civilization. What they would like to see is a war to the death between Germany and England, with France and Italy involved. When these four nations had torn themselves to pieces in the struggle, Russia would march in and dominate Europe. That is their pleasant little plan, which we have to prevent, even at the cost of concentration camps."

Later, by some chance, the conversation turned upon religion.

Elisabeth von Metzen denied that there was any attack on Christianity in Germany. The churches, she said, were filled at every service.

"But Pastor Niemöller still remains in prison," said John quietly.

Helmut answered that point by a few careless words.

"Oh, they make a hero of Pastor Niemöller in England. But the fellow used his pulpit for political attacks on the Nazis. Why didn't he stick to his job, which, surely, was to teach religion? It's the same with these Catholic priests and Cardinals. They interfere with politics. Then the Pope talks about persecution when some of them are arrested for sedition. It's the old quarrel between Church and State."

John plunged deeper into the argument.

"Isn't the Nazi creed essentially anti-Christian? If that's so, isn't it the duty of priests and parsons to warn their people against the undermining of their faith?"

Helmut looked at him sharply for a moment and then answered good-humouredly:

"Some Nazis are anti-Christian, no doubt. They don't like a religion founded upon Judaism. But isn't it true also that many English intellectuals are free-thinkers and unbelievers? Do you attack France, which expelled the religious orders before the war and was governed for years by men like Clemenceau, who was the open enemy of the Catholic Church? Now France is governed by Leon Blum, who does not call himself a Christian. But American and English

critics of Germany have quite an affection for Leon Blum!"

"Aren't we getting a little too controversial?" asked Elisabeth von Metzen.

"It's so frightfully interesting!" exclaimed Anne. "Let's go on being controversial."

John was not amused by this form of controversy. He was glad when the evening came to an end, and when Anne asked him to take her back to the Adlon, and he sat with her alone in a taxi-cab.

"Helmut and Elisabeth are charming, aren't they?" she remarked.

"Aren't you getting too much in the hands of the Nazis?" asked John, ignoring Helmut von Metzen and his charming sister.

She refused to think so.

"On the contrary, I think I'm doing a good work for England and all its ideals if I help in the tiniest way to promote Anglo-German friendship. I'm helping to stop another world war. You don't want it to happen, do you?"

"I should hate it to happen," said John.

"We must either be friends with Germany or enemies with Germany. I've no patience with all our Left-minded laddies who are always goading at Hitler and screaming against dictatorship, although they love Mr. Stalin and Soviet Russia. If it came to a fight that crowd would run like rabbits."

"To hell with politics," said John with a laugh. "This is my last night in Berlin. I feel terribly happy to be with you and I don't want to spoil the golden minutes which still remain."

It was a golden hour. She accepted his offer of liquid refreshment in the lounge of the Adlon, where there were only a few people left in distant chairs. She let her wrap slip away from her shoulders and looked exquisite in his eyes. They talked about her brother David and her sister Marjorie,

and Judy and Robin, avoiding controversy until he asked for it again.

"When you kissed your hand to me in Hans Crescent," he told her, "I had an idea of banging the door and telling the old butler that there was a lady inside whom I wanted to embrace."

"Good heavens!" cried Anne. "The old butler would have swooned on the doormat."

"How would you have felt about it?"

"I should have thought you were crazy!"

"And you would have been right," said John. "I'm still crazy about you, Anne."

She had a straw between her lips and smiled as she leaned over a glass of lemon squash.

"But I'm getting disheartened," said John. "You don't stay in the same place very long. I see you only once in a blue moon, and then only long enough to say good morning and *au revoir*. Isn't there an old song on that subject? 'I saw a lady passing by.' That's you."

"And yet I'll love her till I die," said Anne, repeating one of the lines of that old song.

She turned to him and laid a hand on his arm.

"John Barton," she said, "you're a very romantic American. But you and I belong to different worlds. We can only meet across a bridge now and then."

"You put me in my place again," he said. "American reporter. English aristocrat. Keep off the grass, *Verboten!*"

Anne became a little angry with him.

"We've had that out before. It's nothing like that. It's just a question of different jobs and different ways. Your job is to write about things in England and other countries. How nice for you! My job is to see that my family doesn't go to rack and ruin. You must admit I saved David from a nasty spill! Besides . . ."

She checked herself and was silent, with a smile flickering about her lips.

"Besides what?" he asked. "I fear the worst."

"I don't want to be grabbed until I've seen a lot more of life."

John leaned forward and spoke insistently.

"I should show you a lot more of life, Anne! I wouldn't do any grabbing. I would just lead you by the hand and say: 'Lady, there's life—the funny old puppet show! Let's take a front seat and have a look at it.'"

They sat up late, until the waiter in the Adlon lounge sighed very deeply and came to take away their ash-tray. There was no one in the room but themselves. All the other guests had gone to bed.

"I think we ought to go," said Anne. "That poor man is tired, and we're keeping up the lift-man."

"They're paid for it," said John. "There are a thousand things I want to say to you."

"A thousand more?" she asked. "I should fall asleep."

She rose and let him carry her cloak, and then moved towards the lift with its golden gate, through a little passage to the left on the way to the dining-room.

"*Zweiten Stock*," she said to the lift-man.

John was on the fourth floor, but he stepped out at the second and walked with her towards her room.

"I'm off to-morrow," he said, as though telling her that for the first time.

"Yes, I'm sorry," said Anne. "Give my love to England. I shan't see it for a month or two. I'm staying with David. Well, good night, John."

She took her cloak from him, opened her door, and then turned to take his hand.

"Anne," he said, "I'd like to kiss you just once. Any real objection? Or are you too English?"

"I'm too English!" she said firmly.

He had her hand tightly held and tried to pull her towards him, but she resisted and slipped out of his grasp.

"Better not!" she said. "It's only asking for trouble. Sorry, and all that!"

He could see her laughing eyes before she switched on the light and then closed the door upon him. He heard the click of the key in her lock. Through the door she sang out to him: "Good night!"

XXXIX

WHILE John was abroad—too often now for his sister's liking—Judy was having her own private adventures in Chelsea and other districts of London within a bus-ride of that neighbourhood. Her mother had settled down remarkably well. Having joined the American Women's Club, she was never at a loss for conversation with old friends, or new, from Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Kansas City and other strongholds of intelligence and virtue, to say nothing of New York. That was a great comfort to her, and she was happy at having found a lady medium who held séances on Monday and Thursday evenings in Ebury Street, Pimlico, attended by a circle of serious enquirers, and productive, said Mrs. Barton, of remarkable results. They were in touch with a Red Indian chief, Alfred the Great (very worried about the state of England), a vivacious little lady who called herself 'Jenny', Mrs. Carlyle, and Edward FitzGerald, the author of *Omar Khayyám*.

Mrs. Pockett was also a source of information and entertainment to Judy's mother. Regarding Mrs. Barton as being incapable of looking after herself, whereas she was as active-minded and physically strong as a woman half her age, Mrs. Pockett attended to her with unflagging devotion from half past seven in the morning, when she took up the first cup of tea, until half past ten at night, when she put a hot-water bottle into Mrs. Barton's bed.

So that was all right. Judy had no need to worry about her mother, or remain with her constantly. She could slip

away now and then, especially in the afternoons, knowing that her mother would be happy chatting in the American Women's Club, and on Monday and Thursday evenings was sure to go to Mrs. Martingley's psychic circle in Ebury Street.

She could see some of the friends she had made on her first stay in England—some of those professional women in Maida Vale and some of the Left-minded women in Bloomsbury, who were still denouncing the betrayal of the League and Collective Security, upon which they wrote letters to *Time and Tide*, and other highbrow papers. It was nice to see them again and to go into their smoke-laden rooms and be greeted by cries of "Hullo, Judy!" as though she had been for the week-end at Brighton or no farther than the Surrey hills.

One visit she made was unsuccessful; indeed, six or seven visits resulted in failure, until she became despondent. It was to an artist's studio in a mews near Knightsbridge. He had a visiting-card tacked to his door on which she read the words:

Back soon. All bills paid on return. Don't worry.

"Back soon" was vague and unsatisfactory. It might mean that he would be back that afternoon, or not until the middle of next week. As a matter of fact it was longer than that by two months. The first information of the whereabouts of Robin Bramley came from one of the garage hands in the mews.

"He's gone away, missy," remarked this young mechanic, having seen her repeated attempts to find the "artist bloke". "He said something about blue seas and azure skies, but whether that meant Margate or Honolulu I can't exactly say."

"I dare say he'll be back soon," said Judy hopefully.

The young mechanic looked doubtful.

"All I know is that the tradesmen are fretting about him, especially the dairy people, who left sixteen bottles of milk before they were notified that the gent had no use for them."

The young mechanic at the garage spoke to her again when she called next time.

"Not back yet, missy!" he remarked with a grin.

"Oh," said Judy in a non-committal way. "Then it's no use going upstairs."

"You're not the only one that keeps enquiring," he said with a knowing look. "There was another lady came several times. She left her car at the end of the mews and walked down. She looked like a film star to me. Oh, very lovely! She chuckled it after the third visit."

"One of his friends," said Judy carelessly, though in her heart there was a little stab. It was absurd to feel hurt because Robin had other friends who wanted to see him again.

"More than likely," said the conversational garage hand. "That's the privilege of being an artist bloke. Lots of little lady friends, no doubt."

He was becoming slightly too familiar, and Judy dodged him on her next visit, two weeks later. He was busy in his garage when she slipped by and went quickly up the stairs to Robin's door with the brass knocker in the shape of a ship.

No card was tacked to the door this time, and there was a bottle of milk on the mat again.

Judy's face flushed for some reason. She felt absurdly excited and rather tremulous and uncertain. She touched the knocker as though it might bite her and then gave a sharp little rat-tat-tat.

She could hear a quick stride across the floor inside and somebody whistling "Three Blind Mice". The door was opened an inch or two and Robin spoke through it angrily.

"It's no use coming again, my dear fool! I told you yesterday that I'd pay you next Saturday and not an hour before."

He seemed to be aware that he was speaking to the wrong person, and opened the door wide. He was in his painter's overall, and his face and hands were very tanned.

"Good God," he exclaimed, "it's plain Judy!"

"It surely is," said Judy.

"The companion of my youth and the critic on my hearth!" he cried heartily.

"How are you, Robin?" asked Judy demurely. "I thought you had disappeared for ever."

He put his arms about her and kissed her. She was not quite sure whether it was meant to be a brotherly kiss, but she had an idea that it wasn't.

"Lord!" he said. "I was feeling suicidal before you knocked. Now I feel that life is amusing again. For goodness' sake come in and let's laugh at things in this gloomy and deplorable world, which is no place for a gentle artist and a lover of beauty."

"Oh," cried Judy, "how splendid!"

"What's splendid?" asked Robin, watching her as she stood in his studio looking round it with shining eyes. "I can't see any splendour, woman. I see only the same old squalor."

"The cat!" cried Judy. "I was so afraid I shouldn't see the cat again now that you've been away so long. It makes everything seem exactly the same since I left a hundred years ago."

"Was it a hundred years?" asked Robin. "Well, well, how time flies! As for the cat, she was parked with a friend. She has produced three litters of kittens since you were last here."

"Everything is the same," said Judy, looking round the studio. "It's just as I remembered it in Massachusetts. But you've got some new portraits and you've sent one away."

Robin spoke to the cat, as though that creature had an understanding soul.

"She says I've sent one away, Maria. Mark you, she doesn't suggest I may have sold it. Oh no! She's a wise woman. She knows that no artist of genius sells a picture nowadays."

He turned to Judy and asked a question searchingly.

"What makes you think I've sent one away? Which one?"

"There's a new portrait in that frame," said Judy.

She was suddenly stricken by a sense of embarrassment. It was the frame in which there had been the portrait of a certain lady slashed across the face.

"Quite right!" said Robin. "You're a Sherlock Holmes. I burnt the damned thing. It wasn't a good bit of work. Now, how do you like this?" He took her towards the portrait of a Breton onion-boy standing against the background of a London street. The boy had a face full of character and humour, and each onion was painted with loving care.

"Glorious!" cried Judy after half a minute. "It's terribly good."

Robin looked at her and laughed loudly.

"Judy," he said, "how splendid to hear your American enthusiasm! It's like the wine of life to me. My English friends glanced at that bit of work and said, 'Not bad, old boy! But are onions like that?'"

"They're marvellous onions," said Judy. "Each one is a masterpiece."

"And, by God, I think you're right!" said Robin. "Each one of these damned onions took me a week's work. I studied the soul of onions. I became an onion. I reeked of onions. And when that young Breton saw my finished work he said solemnly, '*Monsieur, ce sont vraiment les oignons*,' and I burst into tears. He knew! He recognized they were onions."

"Have you sold it?" asked Judy. "If you haven't, I shall be unfriendly to England. I shall hate the world."

Robin grinned at her.

"My dear Judy Barton," he said, "you're perjuring yourself. You couldn't hate the world. You're one of those funny people who love the world, in spite of all its cruelties and all its absurdities. And you're so pitiful of poor beasts that you ask me have I sold it. I've not sold it, although it hung on the line in that hall of horrors, the Royal Academy.

Every day I slunk round to see if a little red dot had been stuck on the corner of the frame. I crept stealthily behind ladies from Clapham and Streatham, who said: 'Look, darling, that's one of those French onion-sellers. Those are onions, you know!' If a man with a fur collar stopped to glance at it I thought here at last is a potential buyer. He must recognize genius when it shouts at him. But no, my plain Judy, there was no buyer, and it cost me an extra five bob—which I could ill afford—to have that failure returned to me."

"It's a shame!" cried Judy.

"No!" he told her with sudden inconsistency. "I should have hated it really if anybody had bought my beloved onion-boy. I couldn't bear to part with it. I should have begrudged it to some fat fellow who might have hung it in his billiard-room and jerked his cigar at it now and then, saying, 'Rather clever, that, don't you think? Boy with onions, you know. Have another brandy, old bird?'"

"I see you haven't destroyed the unfinished portrait of Judy Barton," she remarked. "I thought you might have painted it out."

He was startled and shocked.

"Painted it out! Why, that head has been my only source of comfort. Every time I looked at it I laughed and said, 'There's Judy, plain Judy, who used to be amused by my little jokes. When the deuce is she coming back again, so that I can work up a few more jests?'"

He spoke seriously for a moment.

"I was sorry to hear about your father's death. Bad luck!"

"Thanks for your letter," she said. "But it was one of very few letters. Aren't you the world's worst correspondent?"

"I can't spell," pleaded Robin; "and I always make blots."

"You never wrote to me to tell me you were going away," said Judy, "and you didn't even send a postcard when you were away."

"True," admitted Robin. "But the fact is, Judy, I went

to the South of France—to a place called Antibes, and that makes any form of letter-writing or postcard-sending impossible, except to elderly American ladies, whom nothing short of murder would prevent from writing postcards to all their friends in the United States.”

“I don’t see why it should be so difficult to write a letter from the South of France,” said Judy, considering his explanation was not good enough to excuse his long silence.

“My dear child,” he explained further, “when one goes to the South of France one loses all mental and moral energy. The life and scenery are so artificial that one loses touch with the real world. One is living in a dream world, a Lotus island. There is no post between dreamland and reality. So what’s the good of writing? Besides, one becomes enervated by sunshine. One gets up and says sternly: ‘I will write to-day to the woman I love,’ or ‘I will write to my tailor, who is getting fractious about his unpaid bill.’ ‘I will certainly write before lunch.’ Lunch comes and one hasn’t written. One says, ‘I will certainly write before dinner.’ Dinner comes and one hasn’t written. One says, ‘Then I will write before I go to bed.’ But one never goes to bed because it’s so difficult to undress, and anyhow there’s a gala night at the Hotel du Cap d’Antibes, and lots of elderly ladies are behaving like Nereids with toy balloons, and elderly gentlemen in boiled shirts are dancing like young fauns on the polished floors. So you see I couldn’t write, Judy. And by the way, where are you living now?”

“I’ll tell you when I’ve made the tea,” said Judy.

Robin was pleased at this suggestion, and spoke again to Maria the cat.

“She’s going to make tea. She knows that the milk is on the mat. She will be boiling the kettle while I go and buy some Bath buns with sugar on them at the Lyons tea-shop in Knightsbridge.”

“Don’t bother about the buns to-day,” said Judy. “I want to keep on talking.”

Robin appreciated the humour of this remark. He did most of the talking most of the time. He made her laugh again, and laughed because she laughed. He stared at her head and said, "I'll have to finish that job of work which I began a hundred years ago. When are you going to sit for me again? And when are you going to get busy with your own brush?"

In the course of his remarks he informed the astonished Judy that his sister Betty had gone and got married.

"One of her blokes," he said. "A rather poisonous bit of work, I fear. But the lad wallows in wealth, being the son of the man who makes all the silk stockings for shop-girls. I stayed at their villa in Antibes, and Betty provided me with pocket-money to try out a system at the tables. It failed. Now I'm back again in this slum living on sardines and tomatoes, which, after all, is a very healthy diet."

"I expect you have a large private income," said Judy. "You're only pretending."

He raised his humorous eyebrows.

"Nothing of that kind for little Robin," he told her. "What I eat I earn."

He had earned a bit from time to time, he admitted. He had done some frescoes for a restaurant in Soho. His tailor was very pleased about it. He had also done a portrait of an American film star who had insisted on paying twice as much as he asked because she earned ten times more than she could spend and was getting very bored about it.

"A wonderful stroke of luck," he said. "I can see six months' food ahead with an occasional binge as a defiance of Fate. We'll have a binge to-night, Judy. I shall dress myself like a gentleman and you will put on your loveliest frock. We'll give a treat to the mob at the Berkeley or somewhere."

"Can't we have sausages and mashed here?" asked Judy. "I'm rather good at sausages. And as Mother is going to a séance I have the evening off. Or would I bore you?"

It didn't bore him. He became excited about the behaviour of sausages in hot grease. He burnt his fingers. He made

a dash in some unknown direction and returned with a bottle of red wine.

They made a banquet by raiding his larder for cheese, butter and fruit. He was filled with admiration for her genius in making coffee. They talked about all kinds of things, from the technique of old Italian masters to the civil war in Spain, which was a daily cause of horror. He didn't like the look of the international situation in Europe and was all for friendship and understanding with Germany before Mr. Hitler asked for things which we mightn't want him to have. They talked about the Russian Ballet, which he had seen at Nice, and about a novel called *Gone With the Wind*, which he had been reading for seven months and was not half-way through; and about comic incidents behind the scenes of the Coronation. They talked about fairy-tales, the Caledonian Market, and the lure of Communism to the younger intellectuals. Robin was still talking when Judy jumped up like Cinderella at the ball when the clock struck twelve and cried out at the lateness of the hour, which was precisely five minutes past ten.

"You're not going!" exclaimed Robin, aghast. "Why, we've only just begun to talk."

Judy's eyes were filled with laughter. She had laughed quite a lot that evening.

"For one of those inarticulate Englishman," she said, "you haven't done so badly. I must go like the wind or Mother will think I've been lured to my death in the streets of London."

She fled from him.

XL

JOHN was glad to be home again for a few months, though he had been sorry to leave Berlin on the morning after his meeting with Anne. In his own mind he was beginning to call the little old house in St. Leonard's Terrace "home", and he had quite lost his sense of being a foreigner in England, especially now that Judy and his mother were living with him.

He and Judy had made many friends, so that London was no longer a vast wilderness of bricks and mortar whose unknown people were hostile to strangers. Chelsea was rather like a village. His neighbours in St. Leonard's Terrace said "Good morning" to him when he paced up and down the strip of crazy paving which was his front garden. He came to know their private lives. Round the corner a pretty young wife with a husband in the B.B.C. had a baby which in due course appeared in a perambulator wheeled into the gardens of Burton Court, immediately opposite, among a "parade" of other "prams" in which the rising generation of Chelsea took the air. That event excited Judy and her mother just as much as though it had happened to one of their neighbours in Massachusetts.

The Barton family had established themselves as well-known residents. The postman touched his peaked cap to them. John had two or three particular friends among the old Chelsea Pensioners belonging to the hospital for old soldiers built by Charles II at the bidding of Nell Gwynn. He liked to see them in their scarlet coats, these old veterans of English

wars, who toddled about and were glad to tell their tales to any friendly young fellow like John who would sit with them now and then on the seats in Chelsea Gardens.

The milkman, with a restive pony attached to his cart, had fallen for Judy, and went as far as bringing her some flowers, grown in his patch of garden on the south side of the river.

The field of Burton Court, where young Guardsmen from Chelsea Barracks played football on certain afternoons, was a private paradise to which the inhabitants of St. Leonard's Terrace had their own keys and where they kept their deck-chairs for sunny days. They were introduced to each other by their small children, or by the indiscretions of bull pups, fox terriers, and Pekinese, who rushed after other babies' balls or made friends with other dogs' owners.

Judy seemed to find out everything about these people, with whom she was soon on speaking terms. She knew that a young couple with two children who had attracted John by their good looks were acting together in a musical show in the West End. She knew that a young wife with an adorable baby had been deserted by her husband after the first year of marriage. She knew that a young man who sat writing in a deck-chair in a corner of the garden was the author of a play which was having a long run at the Royalty.

John was popular among the younger inhabitants of the neighbourhood who came into Burton Court with small-sized bicycles, tin soldiers, clockwork toys, and model aeroplanes. For some reason they picked on him. They brought their broken toys to him for running repairs. They challenged him to a game of cricket. He incited them to bicycle-races which ended in disaster once or twice and called down upon his head the wrath of their nursery-maids. He fell deeply in love with a lady called Jennifer with big brown eyes and the smile of Mona Lisa. She was eight years old and very wise for her age, with an imagination which made life a fairy-tale. She confided some of her secret adventures of the mind to John under

a strict pledge of confidence. Her father, it appeared, was the doctor who had his brass plate on one of the houses in St. Leonard's Terrace.

John also became the adopted uncle of a boy called Richard, who rushed up to him every time he appeared in the gardens and demanded further information on the subject of American Red Indians. His mother was a tall girl who looked too absurdly young to have a son aged nine. Judy had established the fact that she was Joan Halliday, who had written that best-selling novel *Red Sunset*, which had been denounced for its impropriety by an Anglican bishop, an Oxford don, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, though praised for its high moral purpose by an Anglican dean, a Professor of Philosophy, and the literary editor of the *Daily Mail*.

"I'm afraid Richard must be a nuisance to you," she said to John one day. "He has a passion for Red Indians, and thinks you must know all about them because you're an American."

"It's an honour to know Richard Coeur-de-Lion," said John.

Joan Halliday seemed pleased with this remark.

"He's not a bad kind of brat," she said with a little laugh. "I'm rather proud of him myself."

She glanced towards this boy who was talking to Jennifer, with whom John had fallen deeply in love. With his shock of fair hair and slim young figure in a tight-fitting pullover and little brown breeches he looked like a young page in a coloured picture-book.

Then she said something which startled John.

"Sometimes I think it was a mistake to bring him into the world. It's not a nice world, is it? Perhaps he'll grow up just in time to be blown to bits in the next war."

"Isn't that rather a morbid thought?" asked John with a laugh.

"I'm a morbid woman," said Joan Halliday. "You see, my

father was killed in the last war, and I have an uncle who goes about blind because he was in that chapter of history, and my husband, who is a naval officer, says that another war is going to happen as sure as Fate."

John was silent for a moment. He didn't like the look of things himself. He wondered whether that boy Richard would have time to grow up before that next war happened. He hardly thought so. What was happening in Spain seemed to be a dress rehearsal for another European struggle. The Germans, Italians, Russians and French were all in that cockpit of horror, trying out their aeroplanes and their new-fashioned tanks and their bright little machine-guns. The nations in Europe were all lining up on one side or the other. Fascism against Communism, democracy against dictatorship. England was trying to pour oil on the troubled waters, pretending that nothing much was happening, not even when British ships were being bombed and sunk. They had joined a Non-intervention Committee, which turned a blind eye to Italian reinforcements for Franco, or French transport of arms to the Republican side. England, as usual, was trying to keep out of it, trying to compromise, postpone, hold off the day of reckoning. The Non-intervention Committee was a farce! And what about Germany speeding up the production of bombing aeroplanes? What was Hitler's next move going to be?

"England ought to make herself strong in the air," he said to Richard's mother.

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"That's what Winston Churchill says. If he had anything to do with it we should have war in three weeks."

She ran after her small boy, who had fallen off his bicycle.

All these little contacts with English folk of all sorts and conditions were friendly and made life pleasant for the Barton family. They belonged now to this English life. They were made part of it and accepted it. They had friends with whom

they were intimate enough to exchange visits at any time without any formality. They saw a lot of the Langdons. Katherine Langdon and Judy were devoted to each other—almost like sisters—and young Paul strolled in frequently when he was down from Oxford. The English were certainly a friendly folk when once one got to know them.

XLI

YOUNG Paul was keen to hear a debate in the House of Commons, and John was lucky in getting him a seat in the Strangers' Gallery, and sat next to him instead of going to the Press Gallery, to which he had his own ticket.

It was a debate of historical importance, so that the House was crowded and all the galleries were densely packed. The cause of it was the resignation of the elegant young Foreign Secretary, Mr. Anthony Eden, and his colleague Lord Cranbourne, on a point of principle which raised the whole problem of England's foreign policy and divided British public opinion into two intellectual camps. One side was led by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, the successor to Mr. Baldwin, who deplored the division of Europe into two hostile groups "glowering" at each other across the frontiers and had announced a new policy of appeasement by conciliation and the settling of grievances, especially with Germany and Italy. The Opposition was led not only by the Labour Party in the House of Commons, but by all those who still clung to the ideal of collective security and ascribed to that phrase a power it no longer possessed because Germany, Italy and Japan had left the League. If collective security were enforced it would depend mainly on the armed strength of Great Britain and France.

The point of principle upon which Mr. Eden and his colleague had resigned before this sensational debate was not as clear as daylight even when they had made their speeches. It had to do with conversations with Signor Mussolini. Mr.

Anthony Eden had agreed to the opening of such conversations and done some preliminary work to start them, but decided that they should not be allowed to begin until Mussolini had made certain concessions—the most important of which was the withdrawal of Italian troops from Spain and the cessation of hostile broadcasts against England in the Arab world. The Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, argued that conversations between parties to a dispute do not begin usually with a demand that one party should agree to certain conditions before the talking starts. But it became clear that this young Minister had other points of difference with his elderly Chief, who had now taken over control of British Foreign Policy. They were fundamental, he said, but did not reveal their exact significance.

What roused the temper of the Opposition and disconcerted some of the Government's own supporters was the unfortunate coincidence that the Prime Minister had accepted the Foreign Minister's resignation on the very day before Herr Hitler in Germany had made some bitter and ironical remarks concerning him, and at a time when the Italian Press was expressing hatred and contempt for this young man, whom they had never forgiven for leading the League Assembly to impose sanctions on Italy at the time of the Abyssinian adventure. England also had been startled by events in Germany and Austria. Hitler had sent for the Austrian Chancellor, Herr Schuschnigg, and, according to newspaper accounts, had imposed terms upon him under a threat of force which undermined the political independence of Austria, though guaranteeing its nominal existence as a sovereign State.

There was tense excitement in the House. Temper rose high on the Labour benches. There were cheers and counter-cheers as the Opposition led its attack. John glanced at young Paul Langdon now and again, that handsome boy by his side, and saw that he was absorbed in this debate and intensely interested in the personalities of the House. Once or twice

he whispered a question or a comment, and once laughed quietly at a super-heated phrase by one of the Labour members.

John himself was gripped by the drama of the scene. As a student of world politics he was conscious of the tremendous significance not only to England, but to the balance between peace and war in Europe, of this challenge and counter-challenge of ideas and argument in the House of Commons. Chamberlain, that tall, thin, haggard man, with iron-grey hair and a long neck in a tall white collar, looking like a bank manager or the director of a city company, stood for a policy which was an abandonment of the Foreign Office tradition based upon the old balance of power, closely linked with the French alliance, and through France with the Little Entente and Russia. That surely was the reason for Anthony Eden's resignation. But other things were involved. This Chamberlain policy of stretching out the hand of friendship to the leaders of the totalitarian States was a challenge to those who hated dictatorship and the persecution of Jews, and the methods of Hitler and Mussolini. It was, in any case, thought John, an admission that the League of Nations had failed, and that many ideals and dreams which he himself had shared had faded out.

The Labour Party was putting up a violent attack and its members leapt into the fray with excited denunciations of what they said was an abject surrender to dictatorship.

"The Foreign Secretary of England," shouted one of them, "has been stabbed in the back by an Italian dagger."

An old man with shaggy white hair rose in his place, speaking with passion and waving arms, and Paul Langdon glanced sideways at John Barton, in the Strangers' Gallery, and winked humorously as though amused by this veteran actor of melodrama who had appeared on the scene.

It was that old warrior Lloyd George, who had led England in time of war and had helped to make the peace. Forgetting all his past, and deploring the cutting-up of Austria by the Peace Treaties, with which he had something to do,

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according to history, he brandished his battle-axe with the vigour of a young man and challenged the Prime Minister to mortal combat, if words can kill, as sometimes they can, by an attack upon his political honour. He dared to suggest that Chamberlain had yielded to German influence in getting rid of his Foreign Secretary. His argument was based upon wrong facts and wrong dates, as the Prime Minister was able to prove good-humouredly, but he was hardly disconcerted by little things like that, and his fury roused cheers from the Labour benches and derisive laughter from their political opponents.

"There's Winston!" said Paul Langdon, presently, in a whisper. "All this is very amusing."

It was also very dramatic, and everyone in the crowded House of Commons strained to hear the speech of a man who had a great gift of oratory—the last of the English orators in the line of Pitt and Fox—and spoke with the sonorous gravity of a prophet who warns his people of impending calamity. In phrase after phrase of studied eloquence he did his best to freeze the blood of those who listened to him by his tragic forebodings of disaster.

"Since the news of Anthony Eden's resignation," he said, "the friends of England all over the world are dismayed and the foes of England are exultant."

Standing there with the lights of the Chamber glimmering upon his bald head and chubby, clean-shaven face—most expressive when humorous and playful, but now grimly set—he warned the Prime Minister of what might be the fearful consequences of his actions and ideas.

"The old policy," said Mr. Churchill, "was an effort to establish the rule of law in Europe, and to build up, through the League of Nations, effective deterrents against the aggressor. The new policy, perhaps, is to come to terms with the totalitarian powers in the hope that by great and far-reaching acts of submission—not merely in sentiment and pride, but in material matters—peace may be preserved."

His voice sank to a deeper note. His slight lisp became more noticeable. There were dark shadows under his eyes.

"Austria has been laid in thrall," he said, "and we do not know yet whether Czechoslovakia will not suffer a similar attack. This small country has declared that if attacked it will resist. If it resists it may light up the flames of a war the limits of which no man may predict."

The silence of the House was unbroken while he went on with his gloomy and prophetic utterances.

A young American in the Strangers' Gallery, who was John Barton, listened to him with strained attention.

"By God!" he thought within himself. "I wonder if he's right. It all sounds very plausible to me. For England's sake I hope he's wrong."

It was dark when they left the House of Commons, but the lights of Westminster were bright. Big Ben was striking the hour solemnly with deep reverberations.

"All very interesting," said Paul Langdon with a laugh as they walked out of Palace Yard. "Quite an historic pantomime!"

He spoke light-heartedly and with the humorous cynicism of an Oxford undergraduate.

"How do you sum up the debate?" asked John.

The boy's answer startled him.

"It confirms my impression that it's hardly worth while swotting so much at Oxford. I rather fancy my academic studies will be interrupted by a call to arms. 'Regardless of their doom, the little victims play.' Not a pleasant prospect really."

"No," said John. "Let's go and have something to eat."

He felt a sudden sense of depression, because of this boy by his side—Peter Langdon's son, adored by his father and mother, with brilliant prospects, they hoped, because of great talent and charming personality. It wasn't a pleasant prospect that in a year or two he might be lying dead in a trench or shot

down in flames in a fast-flying aeroplane. John had a sudden vision of that in the misty glamour of this London street.

"Those laddies on the Labour benches were very illogical," said Paul. "They want England to stand up to the dictators—including, I suppose, Japan and Italy, to say nothing of General Franco—but they haven't done much to support rearmament and still resist conscription! And they propose to defend liberty and democracy with the gentle aid of Soviet Russia, which isn't exactly democratic, according to all accounts."

He laughed as they strode up Whitehall together on their way to a restaurant in Jermyn Street.

It was not long after that debate in the House of Commons when John was giving a little dinner-party to the Langdons and a few others—Bryan Feversham was among them—that he was called from the table to answer an urgent ring on the telephone. It was, as he guessed, from the office.

"That you, Johnny Barton?" asked the voice of Mr. Speed, his kind and considerate Chief.

"Yep," said John, "I'm throwing a party. Don't tell me that I'm wanted at the office or I'll lose caste with distinguished friends."

"Now, listen," said Mr. Speed. "There's a Reuter message come in to say that German troops are moving towards the Austrian frontier in answer to a call from that fellow Seyss-Inquart—Hitler's nominee, you know."

"Is that important?" asked John, thinking more of his guests downstairs than of the international situation.

He heard Franklin Speed give a dry laugh.

"It just depends on what you call important. There may be a European war about it, that's all. I want you to get off to Vienna to-morrow morning. Our New York office is getting excited. I'm told the French Foreign Office is getting busy with Whitehall. It may be the beginning of the Almighty Smash, but I'm hoping that's a rumour. Well, I won't keep

you. Good night, Barton, and my compliments to your mother and sister."

John went downstairs slowly and stood for a moment outside his dining-room. Something touched him with a sudden chill. It wouldn't be amusing, that Almighty Smash, if it came. This great city of London would be a good target for bombs. This old house might go up in dust and ashes.

As he opened the door he saw young Paul talking to Judy, who sat next to him. They were having some joke together and there was laughter in their eyes. He didn't spoil his dinner-party by telling them the news, though later on he mentioned it to Feversham, who made an excuse to Mrs. Barton and Judy and left quickly for the American Embassy, looking rattled.

XLII

It didn't happen, that Almighty Smash. John was in Vienna when the German troops—a hundred thousand of them—crossed the Austrian frontier and were received with hysterical enthusiasm by the Austrian population, or at least by great numbers of the Austrian population, as though these steel-helmeted men had come as liberators and blood brothers.

"These people have gone crazy," thought John, as he was pushed along in a human tide surging down the Kärtnerstrasse, waving swastika flags and shouting themselves hoarse. They were mostly young men and women, or just boys and girls, marching with linked arms, with wild eyes, with the interminable shout of two words—"Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!"—like some incantation by Red Indian braves or a Harvard crowd at a baseball match. But in those crowds were elderly people, middle-class Austrians, husbands and wives, white-haired men and women respectably dressed. They too were crying those two words until their voices cracked: "*Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!*"

For a little while as the crowds surged backwards and forwards John found himself next to a woman who was laughing and weeping at the same time. She had a worn, delicate-looking face, with fine features, but her hat had gone cock-eyed in the scrimmage of the streets and a wisp of hair had become loosened beneath it, giving her a drunken, disorderly look. She was waving a small swastika and her eyes had a look of ecstasy. Once she stumbled and nearly fell when a gang of boys and girls with linked arms surged past.

John, who stood a head taller, held her up for a moment and she spoke to him in German.

He answered in English.

"I'm an American. Why have you all gone crazy like this?"

He didn't expect her to understand, but she surprised him by speaking good English.

"It is wonderful. Is it not? This is a great day in history for the German people."

"Sure," said John. "But what about the Austrian people? Do they want to lose their independence? Do they like being grabbed by the German Reich?"

He used his elbows again to protect this fragile-looking lady from a stampede by Austrian youth. She clasped his arm and moved along in the crowd with him.

"You are an American," she said. "You do not understand. Who can understand what has happened in Austria except ourselves—all the misery, and poverty, and humiliation, and despair, for twenty years? Austria was cut to bits by the Peace Treaties. Our little children died of starvation. Our young men could not find work. Those who wanted to join Germany—our brother Germans—were put into prison. My son was put into prison and kept there until he died. Schuschnigg killed him—that man who betrayed Hitler, that man who would have drenched Austria in blood because of his self-conceit, that heartless man who spoke of liberty and freedom when his prisons were filled with Austrian boys."

"You're crazy!" said John. "You've all gone crazy!"

He laughed with a kind of anger. He could not understand this mass hysteria in Vienna when, as it seemed to him, Austria was delivering itself up to its invaders and licking its chains. Or had he got it all wrong? Had he been utterly misinformed? To him, as to all Americans, Austria had been one of the world's fairy-tales. In musical comedies down Broadway, in scores of film stories, Vienna was made the headquarters of romance—romantic love set to music—

Viennese waltzes, Viennese nights, Viennese dreams. Was there not always love and laughter in Vienna? Was not student life always gay in the Prater? Were not the flower-girls of Vienna the sweethearts of the world? American newspaper correspondents had conformed to this tradition. They had made a hero of Dr. Dollfuss, who, they said, had been murdered and martyred by Austrian Nazis instigated by Germany. Lately they had written columns about Schuschnigg, whom this mad woman now clasping his arm called a heartless villain.

Hitler had summoned him to Berchtesgaden, confronting him with an ultimatum which gave to Austria a nominal independence but on conditions which made it a vassal State of Germany. He had surrendered to *force majeure*. Then he had gone back and repudiated his agreement and called to his people to defend their freedom. He had called for a plebiscite, a free vote of the people for Austrian independence. Hitler had regarded this as a betrayal. He had spoken a word to his generals, who had been in waiting with all their maps ready for instant invasion. A hundred thousand troops, ready to the last detail, had begun their march with tanks and armoured cars. Squadrons of aeroplanes had flown over Austria. The throb of their engines was overhead now. What about France and England, who had guaranteed Austrian independence? Was it going to be the beginning of a world war?

This woman at his side was leaning heavily against him—this fragile little lady who spoke good English and wild words was fainting in the pressure of the crowd. He put his arms round her and felt her head flop against his shoulder.

"Jesus Christ!" said John, with a kind of prayer in his heart. What could he do about that?

He spoke in English to the crowd about him.

"Say, you crazy people, can't you give me a hand with this woman?"

They didn't understand his English, but saw the dead pallor of the woman and closed round her. A man and woman put their arms round her and saved her from falling as another

group of Austrian boys and girls, a hundred strong, stormed their way past. John was shoved on one side and had to go with the tide, which surged down the Kärntnerstrasse.

An hour later, when his feet had been trampled a thousand times, and when he was still in the midst of a mob of Austrian youth singing, shouting, flag-waving with a mad joy in their eyes for something which had happened to them, he felt his arm grabbed in a strong grip and an English voice spoke to him.

"Hullo, Barton! Let's get out of this."

It was the English journalist Harrington, whom he had met several times in Berlin at the Taverne.

One side of his collar had been torn away from its stud. He had lost his hat and his hair was tousled as though he had been fighting.

"We met," said John, "'twas in a crowd. And it's the damnest craziest crowd that ever I was in."

"Let's get out of it," said Harrington.

"You're an optimist," said John with a laugh.

Shoulder to shoulder they succeeded in shoving their way through to a side-street leading into the Altmarkt, and by patient manœuvring made an escape from the crowds into the silence of a narrow street.

"For this relief much thanks!" said Harrington, taking a deep breath.

Into the silence of a street dimly lit at the far end came the sudden crash of broken glass, followed by a piercing scream and then by strident laughter.

"There goes another Jewish shop," said Harrington. "We'd better make a détour."

He strode down an alley which cut across the street at right angles. John followed him. From afar they could hear the splintering of glass and the splitting of wood, followed by that shrill laughter.

"The Jews are not rejoicing to-night," said Harrington. "Poor wretches! It's a frightful tragedy for them."

"Isn't it a frightful tragedy anyhow?" asked John. "It's the end of Austria, I guess. And now what?"

Harrington did not answer him. He still strode ahead, until suddenly he halted outside a lighted doorway.

"Let's have a drink," he said. "I need it."

It was an old tavern with panelled walls and wooden benches at separate tables.

"I used to come here when I was Vienna correspondent of my rag," said Harrington. "We used to talk here until all was blue. The League of Nations, collective security, the future of mankind."

"The future of mankind is still a great enigma," said John dryly. "I don't think it's been made easier by what has happened to-night."

They were alone in the tavern except for a tired-looking waiter who served them with German beer in pewter mugs.

John lighted one of his Camel cigarettes and offered them to Harrington.

"I seem to remember," said John, "that you told me once that Hitler had no intention of denying the independence of Austria. I took your word for it. Yes, sir!"

Harrington saw the friendly challenge in his eyes and seemed a little uneasy for a minute.

"I'm sorry to have misled you," he said. "It was the belief of every German in Berlin from the Foreign Office downwards, until Schuschnigg played his cards so badly."

"Didn't he stand for the liberty of his country?" asked John. "Hadn't he the right to do so?"

Harrington stared down at the table and seemed to be interested in the cracks of that polished board.

"It's all very complicated," he said. "All my sympathy is with Austria. But Schuschnigg was a fool. He came back to Vienna proclaiming that his agreement with Hitler was a great gesture for peace. Then suddenly he uttered a challenge. 'Not a step farther.' He tried to rally up a popular front by calling to the Social Democrats, whom he had suppressed

and imprisoned. It was too late. The Austrian Nazis had been liberated from their prisons and concentration camps. They weren't going back. In all the country districts they had the support of the peasants. He was arranging for a bloody civil war. If Hitler hadn't sent in the German troops Austria would have been drenched in blood, and it might have led to a European war."

"Won't it?" asked John dryly.

"Not now," said Harrington. "It's a *fait accompli*. France won't move. England won't. Italy ratted when Mussolini joined the Berlin-Rome Axis."

"In fact," said John, speaking with his American intolerance of European moralities, "everybody seemed to have betrayed Austria. Is that how it goes? Hitler invades this country by armed force and no one lifts a little finger to save it."

Harrington smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Austria was betrayed—or mutilated—by the Treaty of Trianon, with which your people had something to do—your idealist Wilson! Don't forget that, Barton. And as for the invasion of Austria, does it look to-night as though the Austrians didn't welcome their brother Germans with open arms and ecstasy? I've been motoring through Austria since six o'clock this morning, starting from Budapest, where I had put in a few days. Every village was beflagged. All the country people were dancing and singing in a delirium of enthusiasm. It's the call of the blood. The *Anschluss* would have happened years ago if France hadn't prevented it."

"Maybe one doesn't see the folk who don't like it," said John. "Maybe they have to keep quiet."

He saw one of the folk who didn't like it there at that very moment.

Outside in the street there was suddenly a sound of shouting and a rush of heavy boots on the cobblestones.

"What's that?" asked Harrington sharply.

He stood up and grasped a pewter beer-mug.

The tavern door was flung open and a young man staggered in, lost his foothold, and went sprawling across the sanded boards. His face was dead-white, with a lock of black hair falling across his forehead. He was followed by six or seven young men who surged through the doorway. They were breathing hard, and their eyes were wild. One of them made a leap at the fallen man, but found someone interposing. It was John Barton, who had pushed his table on one side and strode between the prostrate man and his pursuers. He thrust back the boy—a lad of eighteen or so—who had made a tiger-spring and sent him staggering back against his friends.

Harrington also came into action, holding his pewter mug as a handy weapon, but speaking loudly and sternly in German. The waiter who had served them with beer had taken refuge behind the bar, where he was crouching. The young man who had sprawled on the floor had picked himself up and was now mopping his forehead with a dirty handkerchief.

One of the young men was shouting angrily at Harrington, who answered him very quietly and coldly. One of the other boys made a sudden rush towards the young man they had chased, but John put his leg out and sent him down. He couldn't understand a word of all this guttural German, this noisy shouting, this argument. Suddenly the din died down. They seemed to be listening to Harrington. The tallest of the lads gave a harsh, angry laugh, shrugged his shoulders, and made a sign to his comrades. They went out of the tavern, and there was the sound of their heavy boots going back over the cobblestones.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the young man who had been hunted like a wolf.

He was a Jew.

XLIII

WHEN John returned to London some time later he found his English friends seriously perturbed about the fate of Austria and anxious for first-hand information from him as an eye-witness. Lurid stories had appeared in some of the Left-Wing newspapers about German atrocities against the Jews, and they were repeated with additions in books on the death of Austria, hurriedly written and rushed out from the printing presses. One young man narrated that he had seen the streets of Vienna run with blood when the German troops had entered. John had seen no blood. He had only seen that hunting of a Jew into the tavern where he had sat with Harrington, and the smashing of Jewish shop windows, and the humiliation of Jews made to go down on their hands and knees to wash out the rubber-stamped call for Schuschnigg's plebiscite.

It was in retaliation, he was told by young Austrian Nazis who had been forced to remove rubber-stamped slogans of "*Heil Hitler!*" when they were forbidden by Dr. Schuschnigg. He had seen many insults to Jews, and the ruffianism of young Nazis who had gone round to Jewish shops and houses to blackmail them for money which they could spend in beer-houses or cinemas. German officers had intervened to prevent this hooliganism after the first day or two, and some of the young Austrian bullies had been rounded up and sent to prison. But, without false atrocity stories, the plight of the Jews had been tragic and terrible. Many of the Jewish professional classes were committing suicide, having nothing

left but despair. Thousands were trying to escape to any country where they might find sanctuary. The British Consul's office in Vienna was crowded daily by these would-be fugitives, as John had seen.

But it was not this persecution of the Jews which worried his English friends, though it shocked them. It was a real grief for the dissolution of Austria as a separate State. To them, also, Austria had been a romantic tradition, and a kind of fairy-tale. They had been profoundly startled when the German Army had crossed the frontier. It seemed to them an act of aggression which threatened all the small States of Europe. What next? they asked. What would happen to Czechoslovakia, now encircled on three sides by the German Reich? If Czechoslovakia were invaded there would be a European war. France was pledged to defend its frontiers. Russia was its close ally. England was the ally of France and would fight if France became involved.

It was a volcano in the heart of Europe, and there would be separate fires flaming round the world, as far away as Japan, as near away as France and Italy. England couldn't keep out of it if Germany made a grab at the Czechs.

John found himself questioned on this subject shortly after his return from Vienna in a large room filled with cigarette-smoke, the faint scent of women's hair, and the noise of many voices. It was a large room in a big house at Hampstead whose owner or occupier was the well-known publisher, Hilton Smedley. He was giving an evening party, his guests being mostly authors, male and female, whose works he had the honour of publishing with some slight profit to himself.

"Where exactly *is* Czechoslovakia?" asked an intelligent-looking lady wearing her hair like Teresa Grandini, looped over the ears.

"Now, that's an unfair question," said a young man wearing horn-rimmed glasses who sat on a stool with his hands clasped about his knees. "I always confuse it with Jugoslavia, which is equally difficult to find on the map. But then, I'm

working on a pre-war map which I inherited from my father with the family furniture."

"Well, then," asked the enquiring lady, "who are the Czechoslovaks?"

"I decline to answer," said the young man with the horn-rimmed glasses. "It sounds like a crossword puzzle. I'm no good at that kind of sport. Now, when it comes to darts I'm a gladiator."

He was, no doubt, "kidding" in the English style. It was quite likely that he knew more than he revealed.

"All I can say is," continued the lady who had been in search of information, but had now abandoned the pursuit, "I don't see why you or I should be bombed in our beds because of a country we can't find on the map and because of people about whom we know nothing."

"Exactly!" exclaimed her companion. "I'm all for the *Daily Express* and Splendid Isolation, though why it should be called splendid I've no idea. It seems to be the policy of self-preservation. That's not splendid, perhaps, but I'm all for it. I want to be preserved. I feel I'm worth it."

There was someone present who knew where Czechoslovakia was on the map. He had been there. In fact, he had just come back from Prague, which was the capital of that country, greatly to the astonishment of that lady with the hair looped over her ears.

"God forgive me!" she exclaimed. "I thought Prague was the capital of Poland. But then, I was never good at geography. I'm a pianist."

The speaker who had been to Czechoslovakia was a tall, silver-haired man with a little pointed beard and a faint resemblance to the immortal Don Quixote.

"Czechoslovakia," he said, "was artificially created by those odd-minded peace-makers who reshaped the world after the Great War. They put three and a half million Sudeten Germans under Czech rule because there were some nice big mountains which formed a natural frontier—the old

frontiers of Bohemia. They also put a million Hungarians at the tail end, for some reason which escapes me. They also drew the new frontier to include Russians of Ruthenia, Slovaks and other oddments of races like a jig-saw puzzle. So was carried out the beautiful precept of President Wilson that peoples were not to be bartered about like chattels for political reasons! Presently we shall be asked to go in with France to maintain that sociological hodge-podge. Presently the blood of our youth will be poured out to prevent the Sudeten Germans from claiming the liberty of self-determination laid down by the same Mr. Wilson in his Fourteen Points."

"The blood of this youth will not be spilt, sir," said the young man sitting on the stool. "I have a cottage in the country. I shall retire to it and write my little verses, though all Europe is in flames. I shall remain entirely neutral in Splendid Isolation. The Czechs may clamour for me, but I shall not go."

A dark-haired, dark-eyed young man joined the conversation and challenged the silver-haired man who resembled Don Quixote.

"You state the case of Czechoslovakia unfairly," he said. "It's the last stronghold of democracy east of the Rhine. President Masaryk and Dr. Benes have treated their minorities with the greatest liberality. They have perfect freedom of speech and political views."

"I disagree," said the elderly man. "The Hungarians were 'Czechized' with great brutality after the war. The Sudeten Germans have made twenty or more petitions to the League of Nations for redress of grievances. Now Germany will have something to say about it, and if we're not careful we shall all pay the price of injustice in blood and agony."

The dark-haired, dark-eyed young man narrowed his eyes for a moment.

"You're pro-German perhaps," he suggested bitterly.

"You believe in Jew-baiting. You believe in surrender to the bully spirit."

The silver-haired man laughed good-humouredly.

"Far from it. I'm pro-English. Therefore I don't want bombing aeroplanes over London. Because I'm pro-English I don't want this country to be dragged into a frightful war to defend a State which should never have existed in its present form. We play into the hands of Hitler. We always play into the hands of Hitler because of our past mistakes. We hand him his excuse for his week-end adventures."

"You're a pacifist and a renegade, Wingfield," said Hilton Smedley, the publisher, who had been listening-in while he held a glass of sherry unsteadily. "You used to be one of the honoured leaders of the Labour Party. Now you've ratted, old man, and denounce the people who have put their simple faith in you."

Wingfield? Arthur Wingfield? John knew his name as a writer on political economy and social conditions. One of his books had impressed him a good deal.

Now he shrugged his shoulders slightly and smiled, looking more than ever like Don Quixote.

"I remain true to my principles," he said, "one of which is peace. I no longer follow a party which have deserted theirs."

"In what way?" asked the dark young man aggressively. He was the editor of a very advanced weekly.

"The Labour Party," said Wingfield, "have become militarist. They want to fight Germany because they don't like the Nazi régime, and are busy dividing the world into rival ideologies—frightful word!—Fascism on one side, so-called democracy on the other, until Europe becomes an ashpit and a shambles."

"So-called democracy?" asked Hilton Smedley, the publisher. "What do you mean by that, old boy? Have you joined forces with Colonel Blimp?"

Arthur Wingfield, that distinguished-looking economist, smiled again, and answered good-naturedly.

"I don't believe in the sincerity of a democracy which will call in Russia—the most ruthless dictatorship in the world to-day—to fight on behalf of liberty and standing up to the dictators!"

"Damn!" exclaimed Hilton Smedley. He had spilt his sherry over the frock of the lady with her hair looped over her ears.

John slipped away from this group to talk with other men. Some of them were his friends in Bloomsbury and Maida Vale. They belonged to the intellectual Left. They groaned heavily over the Rape of Austria, as they called it. Not one would admit, as John felt bound to admit, as an honest observer, that many Austrians, a heavy majority in the country districts, had welcomed the invaders with enthusiasm amounting to delirium. He had been among those crowds. He had had his feet trampled. His ears had been dinned by the chant of "*Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!*"

"We've betrayed everybody," said one of his friends. "We've betrayed everything to which we were pledged—the League of Nations, collective security, democracy—and all who put their faith in us—Abyssinia, China, Republican Spain. We're the Judases of the world. I'm ashamed of being an Englishman."

"Thank God you're not," said one of his lady friends. "You belong to the worm family, my little one. Somebody will tread on you one day. Meanwhile, do you mind fetching a sandwich?"

As a student of English life John listened to these various snatches of conversation, and found himself amused. Were there any other people in the world who were so violent in self-criticism, and, in the mass, so loyal and traditional? This crowd belonged to the intelligentzia. To find the mass opinion of the real England one had to go elsewhere.

XLIV

JOHN had a short respite from foreign travel for some months, except for a short visit to Paris with his mother and Judy, when it was arranged that Lucy should come over to England with little Louis-Philippe for a few weeks in the summer. She would be joined later on by her husband when he had his holiday.

Lucy was going to have another baby, and perhaps that was the reason for her being happier than when they had seen her last. Louis, she said, was not working overtime at the office now, and was wonderfully good to her. Only to Judy did she confess one day that for a time she had been very unhappy, having discovered that her husband was attracted by a pretty slut employed in his department. There had been terrible trouble about it. She had threatened to leave him for ever, and even started packing for that purpose, until his pleas for forgiveness and his real terror at the thought of losing her had disarmed her wrath. It had only been a "foolish little affair", she told Judy. Louis had really been faithful to her all the time. Now this storm of passion and tears between them—it had nearly killed her at the time—had blown all the clouds away and Louis was more devoted to her than ever.

"It was all very French," she said, "and I was very Massachusetts. Of course, the family had a lot to say about it. Innumerable cousins and aunts called on me to plead for Louis and explain the necessity of being tolerant and forgiving."

She had been able to laugh about it, though John was also Massachusetts, and not amused. But he was glad that Lucy and the babe would put in some time with them in Chelsea, and it was partly for this reason that he bought a good-looking car—second-hand from Bryan Feversham, who never kept a car more than six months—in which he could take them about with Judy and his mother to show them the English countryside at week-ends when he could get off from the office now and then.

Before Lucy's arrival he made some of these expeditions into rural England and found them pleasant. With his mother and Judy—joined once or twice by Peter Langdon and his wife—they put up for a night or two in country inns, where sometimes the food was not too good, and where sometimes there was a deficiency of bathrooms, but where also it was amusing to sit under old beams or inn rooms hung with sporting prints and eighteenth-century engravings.

The modern rush of life had not invaded these English villages. Their tempo was still quiet and leisurely except for an occasional invasion of motor traffic, which went on again and left them untouched.

Judy did some water-colour sketches of old churches with Norman-looking towers, and a ruined castle or two, and old farmhouses and cottages, while John sat with the sun in his face—the English idea of sun—and enjoyed this spell of quietude and beauty apart from certain thoughts which nagged at him and cast a shadow now and then over this English scene. England was still beautiful, beyond the main roads and the far-reaching clutch of London. It was still old, peaceful and traditional. How long would this sense of peace last? he wondered.

Judy had a gift of getting into conversation with all and sundry in village shops and post-offices, or in farmhouses where they stopped to get water for their car, or on the other side of garden hedges which she looked over to admire the flowers. These folk took a fancy to Judy because of her

bright eyes and sense of humour, and she had great times talking with them while she did a bit of painting.

She repeated some of their remarks afterwards for the entertainment of her brother and to advance his study of English life and character.

"Some of them are getting worried," she said one day when they were having tea in the garden of an old inn in the neighbourhood of Haslemere.

"What about?" asked John, who was sitting back in a deck-chair listening to the hum of bees and the cooing of pigeons while he watched a water-wagtail hopping across the lawn.

"Some of them are getting worried about those broadcast appeals for volunteers in case of air-raids."

"It's time they began to worry," said John. "Things don't look good to me. But nobody in this tight little island seems to take it seriously."

"They don't talk about it much," said Judy, "but it's at the back of their minds all the time. The newspapers are beginning to scare them. All this talk about war!"

"I'm getting a little scared myself," said John. "Things are getting very hot in the international situation. I can smell burning."

Judy was silent for some minutes while John sat with his eyes closed as though asleep. He wasn't asleep. In his mind were those nagging thoughts which intruded into the peace of the English countryside. At the office he was in touch with world news. Reports were coming through every night from Berlin, Munich, Prague, Paris, Warsaw, and other centres of information, or misinformation. There was a high-tension note in all of them. The German Press was focusing its propaganda on Czechoslovakia, denouncing the Czechs for ill-treatment of their minorities, and especially of the Sudeten Germans. The Sudetens were getting excited after the union of Austria with the German Reich. They were demanding autonomy and making a noise about it. Their

megaphone was a man named Henlein, a hefty, broad-shouldered fellow who had once been a gymnastic instructor and was now the leader of these Sudetens and a political extremist, closely in touch with the German Nazis. He had just been over to England, and John had had a talk with him on behalf of his paper. Nothing would satisfy his people, he said, except complete self-government. Surely the English, he had argued, would not stand in the way of self-government and liberty?

All very plausible! But there was one snag about it. France had given unconditional pledges to defend the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, who might make long-delayed concessions to the Sudeten Germans, but would fight rather than let them join up with the German Nazis over the border. Russia was in the background. The Czechs were a Slav people. They had many aerodromes ready for Russian bombing-planes which might alight there in squadrons for attack on German cities. England was allied with France, and if France were involved in a war over Czechoslovakia, England would be at her side. All very dangerous! Meanwhile, the British Government was sending one of its elder statesmen to Czechoslovakia to act as mediator without official responsibility. That was very characteristic of England—always trying to pour oil on the troubled waters, though the waves were mountain-high, always believing in a gentlemanly compromise. Supposing the Runciman mission failed? What then, O Lord?

The British Government was getting anxious. The Foreign Office man who acted as spokesman to the Press hardly disguised his anxieties. Cabinet Ministers were going to the microphone calling for those volunteers for anti-aircraft defence. They spoke with the bedside manner. They were bland and suave. They expressed their belief that "war was not inevitable". "Not inevitable" was hardly a good form of life insurance for a nation. The closer one got to the men who knew what was happening behind the scenes the more worried one became. John had had talks with some of them—a

Cabinet Minister whom he had met one evening at the American Embassy, and one of the elder statesmen, out of office, but still active and keeping his finger on the pulse of Europe. They had been profoundly gloomy. They not only admitted, but even emphasized, the unpreparedness of England, and drew hair-raising pictures of London bombed into ruins and rubble-heaps.

"We mustn't have that war!" had said one of the men at that dinner-table, who was an Anglican Bishop with the face of a comedian.

John was thinking of that conversation when he was called back to his present surroundings by Judy, and opened his eyes after this meditation on contemporary history. The pigeons were still cooing. The flowers were still blooming in the garden of this country inn. The water-wagtail, not worrying, was preening itself on the edge of a bird-bath.

"Hullo!" said John, as though he had just arrived back from another world.

"It'll be terrible if war happens," said Judy. "I can't bear to think of it. England is so beautiful and so peaceful! None of these people want war. They've no grudge against the Germans. They don't hate anybody. I don't believe they're capable of hatred."

"Yes, that's their risk," said John. "They think everything may be settled by a nice friendly talk over a nice cup of tea! They don't understand that Central Europe is a hell's cauldron of racial passions. They still think they live in a nice safe little island protected by the British Navy and all its brave boys. They've forgotten the air. They're a nation of amateurs competing with professionals."

He stood up and stretched himself.

"Better be going back, perhaps. We're dining with the Langdons to-night, aren't we?"

He was sorry to leave this garden of an old inn where it was very peaceful in the sunshine.

XLV

THE Langdons had two guests at dinner that night. They were Frau von Altendorf, Katherine Langdon's sister, and Anna, her daughter. They were spending the summer in England, and Friedrich von Altendorf was going to join them later. Young Paul had come down from Oxford to meet them and would have to drive back that night to get into college before being "Gated".

It was a pleasant dinner-party except for a spectre which once or twice appeared to some of those at table and overshadowed their spirit.

Paul was having an amusing time with Anna, who was excited at being in England again, and was very keen to go up to Oxford and be shown around by this handsome cousin.

For heaven's sake, don't come before the end of term," he urged.

"Isn't that rather unkind?" asked Anna with laughing indignation.

"Not at all," said Paul. "It's because I want to prevent any unkindness. I don't want to wreck the future careers of all my friends, who are swotting like blacks for their Finals. If you appear on the horizon they'll all lose their heads. They're a most emotional crowd, and very susceptible to female charm after being kept in monastic seclusion for two months or more."

Anna blushed a little at this compliment to her charm and beauty.

"You're pulling my leg, Paul," she said with a squeal of laughter.

Her mother was shocked, or pretended to be, by this slang expression.

"Anna!" she cried. "If your father heard you say that he would be angry with you. I can't think how you learn such vulgar phrases."

"Oh, I pick them up from Paul," said Anna. "But I'm not really up to date. I want to learn the very latest things in the dialect of Oxford."

"Great God!" exclaimed Paul. "This strange woman talks about an Oxford dialect as though we spoke a kind of *patois*."

They entered into a lively argument about the Oxford accent, and Paul was bold enough to deny its existence, maintaining that the undergraduates of Oxford spoke the purest and noblest English. He was distressed when Judy confessed that his accent had sounded very affected to her until she had become used to it.

No spectral shadow had appeared up to that time. But it fell across the table when Anna's mother began talking about her son Hans, who had finished his service in the labour camp and was now learning to fly, and, indeed, had already taken his pilot's certificate.

"I'm very nervous about it," said Frau von Altendorf. "It's so dangerous, don't you think?"

"I do," said Peter Langdon. "It's a danger to civilization itself."

"But it's so glorious!" cried Anna. "It gives young men the wings of the gods. It's one of the reasons why I resent having been born a girl. And, of course, Germany's future is in the air. That's what General Goering is always saying. Now that we have the greatest air force in the world no one will dare to attack us, and we shall be able to establish justice in Europe."

For a moment John looked into Peter Langdon's eyes and saw a dark shadow in them.

Paul laughed at this remark.

"That sounds good," he said. "But if German ideas of justice clash with those of England or France?"

"Why should they?" asked Anna, opening her blue eyes rather wider. "Justice is justice. Germany doesn't want anything which is not her right. The Führer has no intention of attacking other countries or grabbing other people's property. He believes in peace. In every speech he makes he always speaks for peace, especially with England."

"Well," said Paul, "I'm inclined to believe in Adolf's sincerity. But I hope he won't let me down."

He spoke the words lightly and with a laugh in his eyes, but Anna was scandalized.

"Oh, Paul, that's very wicked of you! No one doubts the sincerity of the Führer. He is utterly sincere. It's treason for any German to doubt him."

Paul was undisturbed by this accusation of *lèse-majesté*.

"Yes, but I happen to be a free-born Englishman. I must admit that Adolf and I don't see eye to eye on all things, including Jews, Aryans, and even Austrians, but as long as he's friendly to England I'm going to be friendly to him. *Heil Hitler! God Save the King! Vive la France!*"

"You leave out the United States," said Judy. "I feel hurt."

Paul repaired this omission.

"Long live Uncle Sam and heaven help President Roosevelt! Which reminds me. Have you seen that American play, *Idiot's Delight*? It's alarmingly good. The most daring indictment of war and all its madness. My young soul was considerably moved."

The conversation drifted to plays, film shows, and various places of interest in London. Paul promised reluctantly to take Anna to the Tower of London one day. He absolutely refused to take her to the British Museum.

The shadow had passed. That shadow of faint apprehension which for a moment had fallen across the elder members of this company at the thought of war.

In the drawing-room, Katherine Langdon played a few pieces of Chopin and Anna sang one of Schubert's songs to her accompaniment. Peter Langdon excused himself for a while and went up to his study, where he was putting the last touches to a novel. Mrs. Barton and Judy were much taken by Frau von Altendorf, who was telling them of the differences between German and English social life—little differences of etiquette and custom. The gentlemen, she said, never remained behind at table while the ladies went to the drawing-room. German social evenings lasted too long, she thought, and were not broken up enough. Everybody sat round in a circle and talked. After they had said everything possible about everything they said it all over again. It was all a little more formal than in England. But she loved the German people and German life. The kindness of all her friends there had been wonderful. They all admired England and wanted to be friends with the English, and were hurt by so much harsh criticism in the sensational papers. It was so unfair, they thought. Sometimes it was utterly untrue.

John Barton did not intervene in this conversation. He was busy with his own thoughts. He was feeling desperate about Anne Ede. He had hardly seen her since their meeting in Berlin. She had stayed in Germany for some time and had only recently come back. He had seen her one night at the Savoy. She was with a group of friends, including that good-looking young German, Helmut, and his sister Elisabeth.

"When am I going to see you again?" he had asked her.

"You're seeing me now," she had answered, holding his hand for a moment. "Come and talk to us."

He couldn't tell her very well that he wanted to see her alone and that he didn't care for conversation in a crowd.

Then he had met her again one night. It was in the dance-room of Grosvenor House, where he had taken Judy and Anna with young Paul. Anne was sitting at one of the little tables with Helmut. Presently he rose and bowed to her in the German style and she nodded and laughed up at him and then

rose and let him put his arms round her on the dancing-floor. Presently she saw John and smiled across the room. A moment later she brought her German over and was delighted to see Judy again.

"May we join you?" she asked, introducing her friend.

He talked to her in a crowd again and was able to put in only a little private conversation. It included a suggestion that she might take tea with him again in Kensington Gardens.

"Why not?" she had said.

"Tomorrow?"

No, that wasn't quite possible. She had promised to see an old aunt living at Hayward's Heath. She was driving down to spend the week-end.

"I'll ring you up one day," she promised. "We'll make an assignation."

So far she hadn't rung him up.

"You're very silent to-night, John," said Judy, as he sat in Peter Langdon's drawing-room.

"Deep in thought," he said, smiling at her.

Young Paul, who had been teaching Anna some new dance-steps, glanced at his wrist-watch.

"I'll have to get away in half an hour. There's time to hear the news if anybody wants to know the latest horrors."

"Need we?" asked his father.

Anna wanted to listen.

There was the usual S O S for an unfortunate man on a trawler in the North Sea whose mother was dangerously ill, and the usual police message for any witness of a motor-car which had run over a small boy, inflicting fatal injuries.

The weather report was unsatisfactory for the time of year.

In Palestine four Arabs had been killed and seven seriously wounded when a bomb had exploded at 10.30 that morning outside the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem.

In Spain a village about fourteen miles from Sagunto had been captured by the insurgents after heavy losses on both sides.

"Do you find this amusing?" asked Peter Langdon with a deep sigh.

"Stick it, Father," said Paul, grinning at him. "These are the stern facts of life."

Chinese troops were preparing to defend Kiukiang on the Yangtze.

The Evian Conference on the problems of Jewish refugees had not started well. A Zionist memorandum stated that the world to-day was divided into countries in which Jews cannot live and countries which they must not enter.

"Tragic!" exclaimed Judy. "I can't understand . . ."

New marriage laws had been passed in Austria, bringing them into line with those already existing in the Reich. Marriage would be restricted to those satisfying blood and health tests.

"You might do that in England," said Anna.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, had made a statement on the progress of Air Raid Precautions. The production of gas-masks for the civilian population was being speeded up as fast as possible. Many millions would shortly be available. He called for a million volunteers for first-aid fire-fighting and anti-gas precautions in the event of war.

"Oh, well, all that is very boring," said Paul. "I shall have to shove a few things in my suit-case."

It was his father who switched off the radio when he left the room, followed by Anna, who volunteered to give him a helping hand.

For a moment there was silence, and then Anna's mother spoke to Peter Langdon with astonishment and distress.

"Peter, what does all this mean? Why are the English people being provided with gas-masks? What is all this talk about war?"

Langdon looked at her sombrely and then raised both hands slightly.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm getting worried about it. The Government seems to be thinking of nothing but impending war. We're spending untold millions on rearmament.

Parliament seems obsessed with the idea that it's a race with time. The newspapers are raising a war scare and some of them seem to be anxious for it to happen—asking for it—stirring up hatred again, filling the public mind with dark suspicions and dark fears. Fortunately, on the whole the people refuse to be scared."

"But, Peter," said his sister-in-law, "who is the enemy? Who is going to declare war on you?"

"I keep asking that," said Langdon.

Frau von Altendorf stared at him as though searching for the truth in his eyes.

"Tell me," she said urgently. "Surely you don't believe that Germany is the enemy of England?"

"No," said Langdon, "I don't believe that. I refuse to believe it."

His sister-in-law spoke again emotionally.

"But the Government and the English people? Do they believe that Germany is preparing to attack them? If so they must have gone mad."

She laughed at the absurdity of such belief.

"If they knew Germany they couldn't believe it," she said. "I know the German people; I belong to them. All my friends and my children's friends want nothing but friendship with England. They're sentimental about it. They keep on asking me why the Socialist papers in England are so critical of Germany and so hostile to Hitler. It hurts them. Sometimes it even makes them angry, but it's because they long for a better understanding between our two countries. Friedrich's friends who fought in the war have told me a thousand times that Germany and England must never go to war with each other again. They say that would be the unpardonable crime."

"I agree," said Langdon. "But we may be caught in some combination of powers or dragged into war against our will by some international episode. I'm afraid of that happening. But if it happens it will be a crime and a madness at which all the devils of hell will laugh. Haven't we learnt anything from

the last war? Is all its agony wasted? If I thought that Paul and all the other boys—German and English—would be hurled into the flames of another war I should despair of human intelligence. If ever poison gas creeps down the streets of London I shan't put on a gas-mask. I shall go out and breathe deeply. For what would be the good of life?"

"Peter," said his wife, going quickly up to him as he stood with his back to the fireplace, "you won't sleep to-night if you go on like that! And it's all nonsense, anyhow. There's not going to be any war. I've heard you say so a thousand times. So why worry?"

Peter Langdon patted her hand for a moment and laughed.

"I'm not really worrying," he assured her. "But it gets on one's nerves sometimes. Let's have some more music."

It was Judy who sang to them while Katherine Langdon played for her.

The spectral shadow passed again.

XLVI

JUDY was working in Robin Bramley's studio again and having a good time, but rather a lonely one, as he had gone away for a few weeks to paint the portrait of a provincial mayor in his robes and chain of office for presentation to the Town Council. It was a bread-and-butter job, he had told her before departing and leaving her the keys of his studio and a free run of his workshop, as he called it.

"If any visitors call," he said, "be rude to them, and don't let 'em waste your time. Tell them I'm serving a sentence for burglary and likely to be away for three months. And for goodness' sake clean your brushes when you leave off work. I've seen many an artist go to ruin because he forgot to clean his brushes."

Not a line came from him while he was away, but a stack of letters arrived for him, and from time to time a visitor appeared, mightily surprised to find Judy installed in the studio, and painting a little girl called Jennifer, who belonged to Burton Court.

One of these visitors was a lady with whom Judy had once crossed the Atlantic. It was Vera, Countess of Munstead, whom she had also met during a week-end at Aldermere, and just for a second one day in the mews below.

"Hullo!" she exclaimed when Judy opened the door to her. "What are you doing here?"

"Working," said Judy.

"Is Robin in?"

"No, he's away."

"Oh, rotten luck again!"

She looked sorry about it and turned to go, but she hesitated and spoke again:

"I'm Lady Munstead, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Judy. "Would you care to come in?"

Lady Munstead went into the studio and glanced round it as though amused by what she saw. She was very lovely, thought Judy. She was like one of those mid-Victorian women painted by Millais with a creamy complexion and long lashes to her brown eyes and a little straight nose and full chin.

"Robin painted my portrait here," she said. "He was very much in love with me at the time."

"Was it a good portrait?" asked Judy.

"Frightfully good," said Lady Munstead, "though I think perhaps it made me a little too beautiful."

"Hardly possible," said Judy with a slight irony.

Lady Munstead fluttered her eyelashes and smiled.

"That's nice of you! Robin might have said that once. But he was very angry with me because I wouldn't marry him. How could I marry him when he hadn't a bean?"

"So you married someone else?" said Judy.

Lady Munstead nodded.

"I hadn't a bean either. So I married a man with a big house in the country, which bores me very much, and a big town house where the furniture is generally under dust-cloths because my husband hates London, which I adore."

"Not very amusing for you," said Judy.

"Oh, it might be worse! But that's why I come to see Robin now and then. He amuses me. He always makes me laugh, and I love to laugh. But he's so afraid that I want to make love to him that he is very sulky and very rude."

"Perhaps you hurt him when you married somebody else," said Judy.

"Yes. Funny, isn't it? I thought romantic love had gone with crinolines and bustles. But Robin took it badly. He went about like the forsaken lover in a Drury Lane melodrama,

and when I tried to comfort him he called me a slut ! So silly of him !”

“Why do you tell me these things ?” asked Judy. “I did not ask you to tell me. I don’t want to know them.”

Lady Munstead looked surprised and amused.

“Oh, why not be frank ?” she asked. “Aren’t you keeping company with Robin ? Doesn’t he ever talk about me ?”

Judy answered very coldly :

“He allows me to use his studio while he’s away, and I’m afraid I’m rather busy.”

Lady Munstead laughed in quite a friendly way.

“Sorry if I’ve hurt your feelings. But I’m one of those frank creatures who just say what they think. And what’s the good of pretending ?—especially as we’re all going to be blown to bits very soon. That’s why I came to see Robin to-day. I wanted to laugh with him again before the German aeroplanes came over and we all get smashed to bits. I wanted to tell him that I’m still very much in love with him.”

Judy stared at her in consternation. Had this woman gone mad ? What was all this nonsense about being blown to bits ?

Lady Munstead seemed to read her thoughts.

“Oh, I haven’t gone gaga ! But my husband gets to know things. He thinks October 1st is the probable date for the war in the air. Six weeks more of life ! Well, so long ! Give my love to Robin, won’t you ?”

She held out her hand and Judy took it.

“You rather frighten me,” said Judy.

Lady Munstead laughed at those words.

“Oh, it’s no use being frightened,” she said. “What is death ? And, for the matter of that, what is life ? Mostly an illusion, don’t you think ?”

She went away, and Judy stood for several minutes quite still in the studio. Little Jennifer had gone away in a taxi an hour ago. Judy had been cleaning her brushes and pottering about. Now she stood rigid, staring through this gloom at one

of Robin's pictures which she did not see. Was it possible that war was coming to England? Did that woman really know? She had noticed that John had been getting worried about it. He was very pessimistic and slipped things out now and then which seemed to suggest dark apprehension of impending war. It was all about Czechoslovakia. No settlement seemed possible among the minorities there—those Sudeten Germans, whose very existence had been unknown to her until recently. They were working themselves up into a fever, fanned by propaganda from Germany. There had been fights between them and the Czechs. Their leaders were refusing all concessions, John said. The German Press was conducting a campaign of violent abuse against Dr. Benes and the Czech Government, accusing them of atrocities against the Sudetens. That was what John told her.

She had heard him lately pacing about his bedroom when he ought to have been sleeping. Several times she had heard him groan as though tortured in his spirit. But she couldn't believe this war was going to happen. Why should it happen, when all the German people were so friendly to England? Frau von Altendorf said so many times. That handsome young German whom she had met with Anne Ede had told her so. Even John admitted that, though he had no trust in the leaders of Germany, and was very prejudiced against the Nazis. The English people themselves didn't want war and didn't believe it was coming. Now and again they were scared by broadcast warnings and by the sensational newspapers, but they went on as though nothing were happening to menace their lives. She had been watching the faces of the people in the streets. They were quite calm. The women were doing their shopping just as usual. The cinemas were crowded. England was more interested in the Test Match than in Czechoslovakia. There was no sign anywhere of alarm or panic, except among intellectual groups who took gloomy views about almost everything. The garage hands in the mews didn't seem to think a war was coming. They whistled and exchanged jokes

as they cleaned their cars. One of them was whistling now—an American tune called “I Saw Stars”. She could hear laughter down in the mews. Some of the garage children were shouting in shrill voices. Somewhere a piano-organ was playing. All the melody of London life went on. The English people were surely unconscious of approaching doom. Only six weeks of life ahead? That woman must be mad, she thought.

XLVII

JUDY finished cleaning her brushes and washed her hands at the sink. There was no need to hurry home. It was one of her mother's evenings with the spirits, and John was away in Birmingham on some story for his paper. She decided to walk home to get some fresh air and exercise, but this idea was frustrated by meeting someone on the stairs as she was running down to the mews. She ran into that someone's arms.

"No, you don't!" he said. "No escape, fair lady!"

It was Robin who held her in his arms.

"So you're back, are you?" she enquired, quite unnecessarily, considering that he held her tight. "And you didn't even take the trouble to send me a postcard!"

"I did write once," he told her, "but somehow it failed to get posted."

"How's the portrait?" asked Judy, going upstairs again unresistingly as he gripped her arm.

"Foul!" he assured. "Sometimes I had to stop and laugh at it. The old Mayor looked like one of Belcher's bar loungers. His purple face clashed with his scarlet gown. But I rather liked the old scoundrel. There was no damn' nonsense about him, and he told me hair-raising stories of graft and corruption in the Town Council. Moreover, he liked my caricature of him, and said it was a speaking likeness. I told him if it spoke some of the stories he had told me it would have to be removed from the Mayor's Parlour. We parted on excellent terms, and I'm the richer by eighty quid, with three more commissions on the strength of it."

"Why, that's wealth!" cried Judy.

"I'll say it is, kid," agreed Mr. Robert Bramley, with a poor imitation of American slang.

He strode into his studio and flung his raincoat over a chair. Then he looked round with a smile at finding himself in his "slum" again, and his roving eyes came to rest on Judy's portrait of Jennifer.

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" he exclaimed. "The woman is miraculous! She excels her master. That's a nice job of work, Judy; honour bright."

Judy blushed deeply. This praise from a man who knew was very warming to her soul.

"I thought it seemed to come rather well," she said modestly.

"I like the way you've handled it," said Robin. "No niggling. You haven't funk'd it. And you've got quality into it. A nice kid, too. She'll be a beauty one day."

He sighed for a moment as he turned away to put his hat on a peg behind the studio door.

"Why do you sigh?" asked Judy.

"Oh, I don't know! Things don't look too good for nice kids just now. I see in the evening paper that they'll soon be fitting on their gas-masks. What a charming world, eh, when small children have to be told about poison gas instead of getting on with their fairy-tales? What a commentary on the grown-ups!"

Judy looked into his eyes gravely.

"Do you think it's going to happen, this war?"

He hesitated for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. I can't see any reason for its happening. But people in the know seem to think it's coming along. Why we should be dragged into the flames because of Czechoslovakia is one of those riddles which are beyond my intelligence. If the Sudetens, or whatever they call themselves, are fed-up with Czech rule and want to shout '*Heil Hitler!*'; and do the goose-step with their brother Germans, why the hell shouldn't

they? Why should we march into the furnace of another war because France has pledged herself to prevent any alteration of the Czech frontier? Silly, I call it. It was all the fault of those old dotards who helped to make the Peace Treaties and made 'em wrong. Czechoslovakia—that hodge-podge of hostile races—is the most amusing example of their handiwork. The devil laughed up his sleeve in the council chamber where those old men were busy with their maps. 'I'll teach you!' he said to himself. 'You'll learn a little geography later on, gentlemen. What you are doing now will be grand work for me. More blood. More agony. More hell on earth. Ha! Ha! Ha! and also Ho! Ho! Ho!'

"Robin!" said Judy, "you frighten me. And I've been frightened already to-day."

"Who frightened you?" asked Robin, ignoring his own share of fright-making.

Judy hesitated a moment before telling him:

"A lady visitor. One of your friends. Vera—Lady Munstead."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Robin. "Has she been round again? She won't leave me alone. She tries to break down my virtue. She tries to lure me into sin by her abominable beauty."

He laughed as he spoke like that, but Judy could see that he was uneasy and vexed by this visit of Vera, Lady Munstead.

"Tell me about her," said Judy. "I want to know."

"Nothing much to tell," he said. "I fell in love with her. I fell out of love with her when she chucked me for someone else after I had spent quite a lot of money on her and spilt my heart's blood at her feet. It's finished as far as I'm concerned. I've no further use for the lady."

"She loves you," said Judy. "She sent her love to you. She wanted to say good-bye before we were all blown to bits. That's why she frightened me."

For a moment or two Robin was silent, then he began whistling and moving about the room, altering the arrangement of one or two pots on the shelf over the fireplace.

"Let's forget all that," he said, "it belongs to the past. Let's go and get a bite of food."

"Fine!" said Judy. "I feel like it."

"By the way," he said presently, after washing his hands at the sink, "there was something I wanted to say to you, but I can't quite think what it was. Let's see, now——"

"Does it begin with an A or a B?" asked Judy, readjusting her hat with the aid of a cracked mirror in an eighteenth-century frame.

"Oh, I know!" he said. "It occurred to me in the train."

"Well?" said Judy, not too pleased with the effect of her hat.

"It occurred to me," said Robin, "that you and I get on very nicely together, and that now I'm beginning to paint provincial mayors, and getting paid for the job, we might as well stable horses together. I mean we might make a match of it. That's to say we might entwine the Union Jack with the dear old Stars and Stripes. In other words, I don't see why we shouldn't get married. It would save you going home at night. You'd economize in taxi fares. I should be happy to clean your shoes if in return you'd clean my brushes. What do you say, woman? How does it appeal to you, plain Judy?"

While he was speaking he had come behind her as she stood in front of the mirror and then had clasped her arms and leaned forward so that his cheek touched hers, as their eyes met in the mirror. His eyes had a laughing look in them and great kindness.

"It seems to me a perfectly sound idea," said Judy. "I can't see anything against it."

"It seems to me extraordinarily amusing," said Robin. "It makes me laugh. It's the best joke we've had together yet."

Judy laughed with tears in her eyes for a moment. After all, she wasn't a predestined spinster.

XLVIII

As the summer days passed, John Barton, as an American observer of English life, had the sense of watching the approach of a world calamity drawing nearer and nearer with a frightful inevitability like the coming death of a man in the last stage of a malignant and mortal disease. Yet there were times when it seemed very unreal and imaginary, because of the geographical remoteness of the danger-zone in its relations to England—as far away as Czechoslovakia—and its still farther distance from the knowledge and interests of the people among whom he lived. None of them in the mass had ever been in that country. Few had ever seen a Czech or a Slovak. Most of them, in spite of newspaper articles, had no definite idea as to what all the trouble was about between Sudeten Germans, of whom they had only heard in recent months, and Czechs, with whom they had no social or political ties. It was not easy for the ordinary working folk of England to realize that what was happening in Central Europe among these unknown peoples might lead—in a few weeks—to the destruction of their own cities and the widespread slaughter of their populations by aerial bombardment. They didn't realize it in the mass, and that made the approach of this menace all the more horrible to those who, like John himself, had a certain amount of inside knowledge and knew that the tension was increasing day by day and, later, hour by hour.

The business and pleasure of life went on uninterruptedly for most people, and he himself had to attend to family affairs and the little duties of social life when all the time there was

this dark foreboding in his brain, though sometimes he was able to ignore it like the pain of a nagging tooth. Now and then he wondered whether he was over-dramatizing it all, or in a morbid way exaggerating the danger. The English folk didn't let it interfere with their pleasures. He drove down to the sea several times with his mother and sisters—Lucy had now arrived with the small boy—and bathed from the sands at Littlehampton and Bognor, where the usual holiday crowds were enjoying themselves in family groups. The sea was uncommonly cold, but many boys and girls in their bathing-clothes were tossing health-balls and even sun-bathing outside the wooden huts. Sturdy children were building their sand-castles. Young mothers sat around with their babes. An adventurous youth who put out to sea in a canvas boat was watched by a small crowd of Christopher Robins. There was no sign of impending doom, except in the headlines of the newspapers. On the day that John took Lucy and Judy to Littlehampton Dr. Benes, the President of the Czechs, had put forward fresh proposals to the Sudeten party leaders, but serious incidents between Sudetens and Czechs were happening on the frontiers, arousing the fury of the German Press, working under orders from Dr. Goebbels.

It did not look as if that English mediator, Lord Runciman, were making much headway in conciliation. Supposing he failed? What then?

John went out for a swim with Judy at Bognor after a motor-drive through enchanting country and a visit to Arundel Castle, still the home of the Dukes of Norfolk, who had been there for the most part of English history. Judy was a fine swimmer and they had some fun together in the sea.

"Isn't this glorious?" she cried before going back to the bathing-hut.

Something had happened to Judy, he thought. He had thought so for several days. She went about singing to herself. Her eyes seemed to be brighter than usual. Perhaps it was because Lucy had come from Paris with the brat Louis-Philippe,

who was a bit of a nuisance in the house because he yelled at times.

Lucy was doing needlework with that infant crawling in the sand beside her. She was looking forward to the day when her husband would arrive.

Would he arrive? John had that question in his mind when he lay at full stretch in the sand with a sense of physical pleasure. Something very unpleasant was happening in Germany. Not much was being said about it in the English newspapers. Far more news was reaching America on the subject, and Bryan Feversham at the Embassy was knowledgeable about it. Hundreds of thousands of young men from the labour camps all over Germany had been sent to the Western Front and were digging formidable defences called the Siegfried Line opposite the Maginot Line. They were digging as though for dear life, and a certain date ahead when the line would be impregnable against French attack. The German Army, according to Feversham, who got his information from military attachés of other Embassies, were calling up some of the reserves and had been given authority to conscript civilian goods and labour for military purposes. It amounted to a partial and secret mobilization. For what purpose and for what time-table of future events? It was quite clear that Germany would not leave this Czechoslovakian problem to be settled by the friendly mediation of Lord Runciman. Germany was going to intervene by armed force. In that case Great Britain had no such pledge. France was pledged to defend the Czech frontiers. The Prime Minister had repeated that several times. But he had also made it clear to Germany, as well as to his own people, that if France became involved Great Britain could not stay neutral.

These thoughts passed through the brain of John Barton as he lay in the warm sand listening to the laughter of English children and now and then to conversation between Lucy and Judy.

He listened now. Lucy was saying something about the

possibility of war. It was the first time she had spoken about it, and he had kept off the subject in order not to worry the womenfolk.

"Judy," she said suddenly, "would England fight if France had to go to war again with Germany?"

Judy laughed at this tremendous question.

"I'm told so on the best authority," she said, having been told by Robert Bramley. "But for goodness' sake don't talk about such things, Lucy! It takes the glamour out of the sunshine."

But Lucy went on talking about it.

"Louis is getting worried," she said. "He seems to think the international situation is getting worse. He thinks the French Communists are goading the Government towards war against Germany because of their hatred of Hitler and his régime. There's some terrible stuff in the French newspapers, but I don't read them. I dare say they're all lies."

"Quite likely!" said Judy. "But I'm rather afraid little Louis-Philippe has some sand in his eyes."

This suggestion diverted Lucy's attention from a painful topic of conversation.

John sat up and decided to give a helping hand to a young English gentleman, almost entirely naked, who was making a sand-castle with his sister. But he noticed something queer about Judy again.

"What have you been doing to yourself, lady?" he asked. "Have you been visiting a beauty parlour, or something of the kind?"

"Do I look so beautiful?" asked Judy with a flutter of eyelashes.

"Well, you look as if you had just had a gift of a million dollars. Unnaturally elated about something."

Judy laughed at this brotherly comment upon her personal appearance.

"It's the English sun and the sea air."

"Well, it doesn't make me feel like that," said John.

He went over to the boy with the sand-castle and volunteered for service:

"What about making a moat and a tunnel, young fellow?"

He forgot the international situation with these two children. But he was reminded of it by the small boy when a very distinguished sand-castle had been built with a moat and a tunnel.

"Now we'll bomb it from the air," said this Saxon-looking lad with fair hair and blue eyes like Alfred the Great at the same age, according to a picture in John's first reading-book.

"I wouldn't do that," said John. "That's a fine architectural structure, sonny."

"Oh, it must be bombed," said the small boy firmly. "I'll be the enemy."

He collected some fair-sized pebbles and flung them with deadly aim at the sand-castle, which collapsed into ruins, to his great delight.

"Jean and I are going back to-day," said the small boy. "We live in Kensington."

"Fine!" said John. "I know Kensington Gardens. A very good place for hide-and-seek. I may see you there one day."

Kensington. What would they do in Kensington if bombing aeroplanes came over with fair-haired, blue-eyed pilots, who belonged to Saxon tribes?

"I shall have to watch this situation," he thought. "No need for immediate action, of course, but Mother and Judy will have to get away if the worst happens. The point is how shall I know when the time arrives? And what about Lucy?"

He was forced into a conversation on the subject that night after the drive home and a late dinner and a telephone-call from his office.

Judy tapped on his door when he was going to bed.

"Come right in, lady!" said John. "I'm still decently clad."

She came right in and sat on his bed.

"I've something to tell you," she said.

"Something good? If not, don't tell me. I need a restful night."

"Something terribly good!" said Judy.

She hesitated to tell him, and laughed instead.

"A joke?" asked John, folding up his jacket. "A real wise-crack?"

"It's funny, but incredible," admitted Judy. "The truth is——"

She laughed again and got off his bed and caught hold of his arm.

"John, what do you think? Robin and I think of getting married one day. We've found out that we suit one another very well. We have an idea we could be very happy together."

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed John.

He put his arm round Judy and kissed her.

"Say, that's fine! At least it might be fine if it had happened at some other time."

"What do you mean by that, John?"

Judy was disappointed by this lack of enthusiasm.

"I mean now is not the time for marrying or giving in marriage," said John. "Nor is this the place, Judy. I've been thinking to-day that I ought to be getting busy about booking a stateroom for you on a home-going ship."

"Not for me, John," said Judy very firmly.

"I don't want to raise a scare about this international situation, but it isn't going to stand still," said John. "It's hurrying towards a crisis. I had a telephone call from Mr. Speed just before I came upstairs. It wasn't reassuring. The British Government have sent for their Ambassador in Berlin. There's a meeting of the British Cabinet to-morrow morning to hear his report on the immediate situation. Mr. Speed says the American Embassy in Berlin is getting rattled. They don't think the peace of Europe can be held for more than a few weeks at most."

"I'm sorry," said Judy. "But I don't see how that affects me and Robin."

John laughed at this simplicity.

"No?" he asked with dark irony. "Well, it might affect you to a slight degree. It might bury your future husband under the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral, or the jewellery department of Harrods Stores when he goes to get your engagement-ring. This international melodrama is going to bear down on the lives of individuals. I'm afraid Robin Bramley won't be exempt."

Judy went rather pale for a moment.

"That's all right, John," she said after a short silence. "I'll take all risks with him."

"I like your spirit," said John good-humouredly, "but it's my duty to warn you, lady, if war comes to this land it won't be a joke. It'll be flaming hell, if I know anything about it. I'm not getting the jitters, but I've got to think of Mother and you and Lucy. Believe me, this little old house isn't exactly bomb-proof! It's a doll's house. And there'll be food troubles and God knows what. I've got to think of a way of escape for you, before it's too late and all the gates are shut."

"I'm staying," said Judy.

XLIX

FRIEDRICH VON ALTENDORF came over to join his wife and Anna, who were still staying with the Langdons, though they intended to take a cottage in Devonshire for a month or so. Like his wife, he was astonished and perturbed by the headlines in English newspapers and by the appeals over the wireless for voluntary service in time of emergency for air-raid defence.

"I cannot understand it," he said during the evening when John and Judy had gone round to dinner. "In Germany no one talks about war. As for war with England, it is quite unthinkable."

The ladies had gone into the drawing-room and Peter Langdon sat with John and Altendorf at the dinner-table in a room which looked out to the green field of Burton Court on the opposite side of the road. The window was open on this summer evening and through it came the distant sound of motor traffic and other sounds of London life. From another open window three doors away came broadcast music from the B.B.C., faintly recognizable as a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan. Close to the window of Langdon's dining-room was the pleasant twitter of birds preparing for bed-time.

Langdon passed a box of cigars to his German guest and gave a sigh, almost inaudible, before he spoke.

"I'm glad to hear you say so. But why is your German Press conducting a furious campaign against the Czechs, and not restraining their abuse of England and France? Rather dangerous, don't you think?"

Altendorf shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"My dear Peter, it's just propaganda. Our Dr. Goebbels is enjoying himself. I admit that this Czech affair is disturbing, but it won't lead to war—certainly not to war against England. Why should it? Surely England is not going to oppose the right of the Sudeten Germans to self-determination? Hitler will be satisfied if they get autonomy, promised them by the Peace Treaties and too long resisted by Dr. Benes and his Czechs. I do not see any cause for anxiety. It is all part of Hitler's plan laid down in *Mein Kampf*. All our German groups outside the Reich will fall into our arms like ripe plums without the slightest risk of war."

"That's very comforting," said Langdon. "I hope you are right, Altendorf."

John looked across the table at this German and wondered whether he was speaking with sincerity. If so, then he was very ignorant of what was happening. Did he know about the partial mobilization of German reservists? What did he think was happening opposite the Maginot Line with those hundreds of thousands of young labour conscripts digging desperately in a race with time? John's chief at the *Observer* office had had a talk that very afternoon with the American Embassy, which had inside information of the British Government's warning to Berlin. From another source old man Speed, who knew many English public men, had learnt that Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, had called on the German State Secretary and given him a strong personal warning as to the attitude of Great Britain in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia, especially if France were compelled to intervene. It was a clear warning that if German troops crossed the Czech frontier by force of arms war would be inevitable. And yet this man on the other side of the table could see no cause for anxiety. Was he lying?

No, he didn't look like a liar. He hadn't the eyes of a liar. He had talked simply and without reserve and with very obvious pleasure at being in England again.

"It's a pity," he said, "that some of your Left politicians

are so hostile to Germany. I do not find that antagonism among your people. On the contrary, I find nothing but kindness and goodwill. I was only talking to-day to a friendly policeman in Sloane Square. When he found out that I was a German he began to talk about the days when he was on the Rhine as a young soldier in the Army of Occupation. 'I got to know the German people,' he said to me, 'and found them a very nice folk. We'd been fighting the wrong crowd,' he said. Then he said something which I found very touching. 'We must never fight each other again, sir.' "

"I know," said Peter Langdon; "I believe that is true of the English people as a whole. And in all my books I have worked for that spirit of peace between our two nations. Ever since the war that has been my main purpose in life. But I must confess, my dear fellow, that sometimes you make it difficult for us."

"I?" asked Altendorf, looking startled. "No, my dear friend, I also want peace."

Peter Langdon laughed in his shy way.

"I don't mean you personally, but Hitler's propagandists and lieutenants. Their denial of freedom is a challenge to civilization. Their treatment of the Jews is unforgivable."

Altendorf groaned, and then laughed.

"Oh, the poor Jews! Don't let us discuss that subject. As for freedom of speech, it is only a temporary restriction in abnormal times. And perhaps a little less freedom is not too bad even in normal times! Your Press and politicians on the Extreme Left are perhaps too free in the way they insult the ruler of a great nation of seventy million people. To say the least, it is a little unwise."

John ventured to make a challenging remark:

"Your officially controlled Press is not setting the world a noble example of restraint at the present time. Doesn't their abuse of Dr. Benes, who is also the leader of a State, go beyond all limits?"

Altendorf raised his hands slightly and then smiled.

"I accept no personal responsibility. Newspapers are perhaps the curse of modern life. I believe in reasonable argument, intelligence, and the English spirit of conciliation and compromise. But I must also confess that in my view Dr. Benes is a very tricky fellow. For seventeen years he has promised to give his minorities equal rights and self-government. For seventeen years he has evaded those promises. Hitler, no doubt, is getting impatient.

"Hitler's impatience may drench Europe in blood," said John in his blunt way.

Altendorf took these remarks good-humouredly.

"No, no. No blood is going to be spilt. Put that out of your mind. I assure you that Hitler stands for peace. He has said so a score of times with sincerity.

"I hope he says it again at Nuremberg," said John.

The Nuremberg Rally was about to start, that annual glorification of the Nazi régime and Hitler's Youth battalions, and the miraculous achievements of the German people.

Ambassadors from many countries had been invited to attend. Hitler was going to make one of his orations. And John Barton knew from private information that the people behind the scenes—statesmen and diplomats and newspaper men—were full of foreboding as to the words he would speak to those massed boys in the great stadium of Nuremberg, draped with the Swastika banners under the white glare of floodlights. Would he speak words of peace or would he speak words of war?

"It's charming to be in England again," said Altendorf, looking out of the dining-room window, through which came the soft light of a summer evening. Your weather is much maligned abroad, especially by the French, who think you live in a perpetual fog! How beautiful and how peaceful it is in that garden opposite! And even in the heart of London one hears the songs of birds."

"Let us join the ladies," said Peter Langdon. "Perhaps Anna will sing some German songs for us."

"She'll be delighted," said Altendorf. "And perhaps if someone is good enough to ask me I will sing an old English song which I love very much."

Later in the evening he sang "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes", and in his own eyes for a moment there were tears. He was a lover of England and of English melody.

L

DURING that summer in England after his visit to Vienna John had been unlucky in his quest of the elusive Anne, and it was perhaps even more unlucky for him that he accepted an invitation to take tea with her at this time of tension in international affairs, because, absurd as it seemed to him afterwards, it was this situation in Europe which spoilt his chance of a few pleasant hours with her and the prospect of others to come.

She had rung him up at the office, and he had some embarrassment in talking to her while Mr. Speed's stenographer, a spectacled young woman of austere demeanour, was sitting at the side of his desk taking down some letters.

"Hullo, John!" called Anne down a telephone which was used mostly for official purposes. "This is Anne Ede speaking, strange as it may seem."

"I recognize your voice," said John, with a wary eye on Miss Witherington, the aforesaid stenographer, or typist, as his English colleagues called these valuable young women who took down their correspondence and sometimes corrected their grammar. "But I agree it does seem strange. Do you speak from this world or the next? Isn't it a thousand years since I had the honour of seeing you?"

"Six weeks!" said Anne, laughing over the wire. "I want to have a talk with you. Any chance this afternoon at the Ladies' Carlton? I'll give you a cup of tea."

"I'd come for a cup of cold water," said John.

He heard Anne laugh again.

"Make it five o'clock," she said. "I'm having my hair done this afternoon. I shall look rather beautiful."

"Perhaps I'd better not come," said John. "I might be struck blind."

He saw Miss Witherington's lips tighten primly, and he was intimidated.

"I'll be along," he said, putting down the instrument.

He went along to the Ladies' Carlton and had to wait ten minutes before Anne arrived, looking so beautiful that he put his hand over his eyes for a moment as though dazzled.

"Thanks," she said with a little laugh at this compliment. "But we mustn't behave badly in this club. It's very respectable."

She led him into the tea-room, where a number of smart-looking women were entertaining elderly men of military aspect and a few younger men of no particular distinction except that they were a credit to their tailors.

"Let's have a quiet corner," said Anne.

She succeeded in finding one by the window with two deep chairs which were very good screens from the surrounding world.

Now, why had she invited John to tea after neglecting him so ruthlessly during the summer? That question was urgent in John's mind, and he waited for an opportunity to ask it. It occurred after a neat maid had asked whether they preferred Indian or China tea, sandwiches or toast.

"Why do you honour me in this way?" asked John. "Having thrown me into the outer darkness through weary months, why do you draw me back to the light of hope?"

"I've been feeling guilty about you," said Anne. "Elisabeth von Metzen once told you I'm loyal to my friends. But Father dragged me off to Ireland with him and now we're going to Germany for the Nuremberg Rally. It ought to be very interesting, don't you think?"

For a moment John stared at her incredulously, and then laughed.

"You're going to Nuremberg? I can hardly believe that!"

"Why not?" asked Anne, taking another little sandwich and pushing the plate towards him.

"Don't you know," he said, "that England may be at war with Germany in less than two weeks?"

"Oh, that's all nonsense," said Anne carelessly. "Have another sandwich, John."

John didn't feel like taking another sandwich. He leaned forward in the deep arm-chair and spoke in a low voice lest he should be overheard by the elderly gentlemen of military aspect, or by sharp-eared ladies not far away.

"I guess I can't tell you anything you don't know," he said. "Your father ought to be behind the scenes, but hasn't he told you that Europe is lurching towards a war which may not be delayed for more than a week or two?"

"Father doesn't think so," said Anne calmly. "He thinks that everybody is making too much fuss about this affair of Czechoslovakia. Nothing is going to happen except a peaceful readjustment of the frontiers. Hitler doesn't want war. Father has talked with him several times. Helmut says the same thing, and he's a close friend of Ribbentrop."

John raised his eyebrows and spoke with irony:

"Is that so? Now, that surprises me. My information doesn't bear that out."

"Oh," said Anne rather impatiently, "I don't believe all that newspaper stuff. I've no doubt you get a lot of lies from your news agencies. Isn't that how you get your information?"

John answered that challenge good-humouredly.

"Maybe some of it is inaccurate," he said, "but we're not entirely dependent on foreign news agencies. We're in touch with the Embassies and the Foreign Offices and with people who pull the wires of the puppet show in Europe. Why has your Government got the jitters? Why is the Cabinet sitting in almost constant session? Why is your Home Office distributing gas-masks and calling for a million volunteers for fire-fighting and air-raid precautions? Is that all just a game of make-believe?"

Anne laughed over her tea-cup.

"They've all got the wind up. A lot of old women frightened to death by false information mostly coming from the Communists."

John considered this answer and found it unsatisfactory.

"Anne," he said after a pause, "it's unwise of you to go to Nuremberg. Believe me! You'll be sorry for yourself if you're caught in Germany for the duration of the war."

Anne was amused by this gloomy foreboding.

"I dare say they would be very kind to me! I've good friends there. But in any case there's not going to be a war. I happen to know."

"From Helmut?" asked John with deep sarcasm.

Anne looked at him a moment with a smile through a flutter of eyelashes.

"Well, he's one of them. But apart from all inside information, do you think England is going to fight to keep the Sudeten Germans inside the Czech frontier, where the poor dears don't want to be? What an idiotic cause for war!"

"It may be a question of honour," said John quietly. "Doesn't England still believe in honour, or is that old-fashioned now?"

"Honour? How is that incurred?" asked Anne, stiffening a little.

John explained his point of view:

"You're pledged to France. If France moves in defence of Czechoslovakia, England is bound to go to her assistance. Aren't you?"

"Very silly!" cried Anne. "Why should we be dragged into war because France has made a pledge which is utterly idiotic—to defend the *status quo* in Europe, which everyone knows cries out for revision? Do you think my brothers ought to die because France demands the blood of English youth to prop up her Bolshevik alliances?"

"It's a question of democracy against dictatorship," said John. "Is England going to lie down under the heel of the

dictators? If Hitler invades Czechoslovakia without opposition it's the end of liberty in Europe. That's how I see it."

"You see it wrong," said Anne very firmly. "It's your American point of view. It's your American ignorance of Germany. I happen to know the Germans. I happen to love them."

"Then you love a people who have let themselves be enslaved and brutalized?"

"Are we having a quarrel?" asked Anne.

They were having a quarrel, and that was the absurdity which afterwards struck John as very foolish and very regrettable. He had come round to tea with Anne in a sentimental mood. He had come round after a difficult escape from his office in a time of world tension to have a happy hour with her, and if possible to tell her he was still crazy about her. Now by some fantastic mischance they had started an argument about the very subject he wanted to avoid—this frightful tension which was going on all over Europe while the strain was reaching breaking-point.

"I reckon I'll have to be getting back to the office," he said; "this international situation doesn't wait while I take tea with a pretty lady."

"Don't go," said Anne. "I want to tell you something. That's why I asked you here before I went to Germany."

"Go ahead!" said John.

Anne looked at him with a kind of amusement, and a kind of pity, and a kind of tenderness.

"Mr. American," she said, "you've been very sweet to me since we first met in the *Queen Mary*. It was nice of you to like me."

"I was crazy about you," said John. He put that state of feeling into the past tense, but unconsciously. Anne was aware of that past tense, but she put her hand across the little tea-table and held his for a moment.

"I know," she told him. "But it wasn't my fault, was it? I mean I didn't run after you, did I?"

"You certainly did not," John agreed.

"We've always quarrelled from the first moment we met," said Anne, "and yet all the time I liked you very much."

"Lady, I thank you," said John politely. "Any little favour like that——"

"I shall always treasure your friendship," said Anne. "I shall always laugh when I think of our conversational battles."

"I'm glad they amused you," said John.

Suddenly he was aware that all this was like a funeral oration. Something had died. Anne was burying it.

"Is this our last meeting on earth before Armageddon?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm going to Germany," she told him. "I mayn't be back for some time. Helmut is going back to Berlin, and I'm going to stay with his family. . . . He wants me to marry him."

John went slightly pale, but he did not look like a man who had been stabbed to the heart.

"Fine!" he said. "You'll be in time to marry a German before he flies over London to bomb English babies."

"Nothing like that," said Anne. "If there's any risk of that I shall come back again."

He rose from the tea-table and said, "Good-bye, Anne."

She rose and took his hand and held it tightly, not worrying about an elderly lady who looked at her through a lorgnette from a neighbouring chair.

"Sorry, John!" she said. "Wish me luck. Kiss my hand as they do in Germany."

He kissed her hand, and something broke in his heart. He had been crazy about her.

LI

THERE was a curious experience one night, rather disturbing, in Peter Langdon's drawing-room. He had invited John and Judy to come in after coffee and suggested that they might like to listen on the wireless to Hitler's speech in Nuremberg, which could be translated by the Altendorfs.

Young Paul was there tuning in to Stuttgart and other German stations to test the best reception. Anna, bending close to him near the radio, was excited at the prospect of hearing the voice of her hero.

Altendorf was smoking a cigar as usual, listening with a smile to the back-chat of Paul and Anna. His wife was knitting in the light of a standard lamp, and talked in a low voice to her sister, who looked so much like her, yet so much younger. Peter Langdon had put on a velvet dinner-jacket, which gave him a very distinguished appearance suitable to his rank as a leading novelist. In this eighteenth-century room, with its panelled walls, there was a sense of peace. Here was one of the sanctuaries of civilization. On the piano, as Judy noticed, a tall vase was filled with roses, perfect in shape and colour, and giving out a faint perfume. Katherine Langdon, too young-looking still to be the mother of Paul, had the type of face which eighteenth-century painters, like Reynolds and Romney, chose for their portraits; sitting there on a low stool by her sister, with her chin on her clasped hands, she had a beauty which Judy noticed with her painter's eye. Her pose, so natural and unaffected, was lovely in its lines.

Langdon's face too went with this room; secret adventures

of the mind had carved it finely. In the eighteenth century when this house was built he would have been described as "a man of sensibility". Perhaps he was too sensitive to stand up to the brutalities of life. He suffered too much pain because of the world's cruelties, as all his books showed.

Judy, with her quick eyes, took in this domestic scene and was aware of its significance. Here was peace. Here was the fine flower of civilized minds. In this room there was no jarring note, no suggestion of cruelty, no baseness. These Germans and these English, related by marriage, had no hatred for each other. And yet some destiny was being woven which might lead their nations to war against each other, against the will of their people.

"It can't be true," thought Judy. "If there's any God, it won't be allowed to happen again."

John, deep in an arm-chair with his legs outstretched, was thinking of things he had heard that day. They were not pleasant things. There had been serious clashes between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs at Marisch-Ostrau and Eger. The German Press was exaggerating them wildly and writing about massacres and atrocities. The Sudeten leaders had used these incidents as an excuse for rejecting the Czechs' Fourth Plan, which gave them almost everything they asked for. They had broken off negotiations with the Czech Government. It all looked very grim. What was Hitler going to say in that night's speech? Would it be a threat of war, or would he proclaim to the world that he wished for peace?

The words they would hear from Nüremberg might decide the fate of the world and that of the people in this room. If Hitler spoke the wrong words it would be sentence of death for some of them there. Paul would be one of those called upon to die perhaps. But who would escape? Who at least would be immune? One fair-sized bomb falling on this old house would go from roof to cellar, leaving it like one of those ruins in the photographs from Spain.

Hitler was speaking at the Nüremberg Rally. In his audience

would be a tall, slim English girl, who would understand his German gutturals. Her name was Anne Ede. She would be sitting there with a young German named Helmut while Hitler was menacing the peace of the world.

John rose from his chair and walked to the window, restlessly. He pulled the curtains open an inch or two and looked out to an English night. There was a touch of mist, and the light from the lamp-posts was blurred. From the Embankment, three minutes' walk away, came the dull roar of motor traffic.

"Now we've got it!" said Paul. "As clear as a bell!"

"How wonderful!" cried Anna. "I can hear our dear German boys. They're shouting and singing."

"Your dear German boys," said Paul, "are like most other adolescents and half-wits such as I find at Oxford. They make the usual noises of the herd."

"The Führer comes!" cried Anna. "*Heil Hitler!*"

"Rule, Britannia!" said Paul, standing to attention and winking at John Barton.

There was a lot of noise in Nuremberg. Thousands of voices which sounded young were shouting "*Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!*" in a kind of auto-intoxication. One could hear the marching feet of soldiers and Storm Troopers and the crash of military bands.

Presently Hitler began to speak, in that far-carrying and resonant and harsh voice which John had heard before over the radio. He went on speaking for a long time, his voice rising and falling in a kind of rhythmic wave, but sometimes broken by sharp staccato sentences and interrupted by cheers which had the flame of passion in them.

Neither John nor Judy could understand German, but they were not bored by this oration, long as it was. Somehow they seemed to get the drama, the thrill, the human vibrations of that vast assembly to which Hitler was speaking. And they watched the faces of Friedrich von Altendorf and his wife and Anna, extraordinarily expressive and self-revealing.

Several times Anna sprang up and clapped her hands and

smiled with shining eyes. Adolf Hitler was saying the right thing for her. But she was rebuked sharply by her father after one of these demonstrations, and sat down demurely with folded hands and a mischievous smile at young Paul.

Altendorf's face was a study. At first he listened and shrugged his shoulders once or twice. Then he seemed to be following the speech with an intensity which made the veins knot across his forehead. Once he looked across to his wife, and they exchanged some silent and foreboding message. Presently he stood up and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, and went to a little table and poured himself out a glass of water, with which he moistened his lips.

Peter Langdon was leaning forward with his hands between his knees. He seemed to understand German, but was baffled to get the exact meaning of this storm of words, getting harsher, getting more strident, sounding more menacing.

Suddenly Altendorf's wife rose and dropped her knitting. She looked extremely pale.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Langdon, rising and going to her quickly.

"It's nothing," she said. "I feel just a little faint. I'll go to my room for a few minutes."

"Bad news?" asked John when this lady had left the room.

Altendorf answered in a low voice, while the voice of Hitler crashed into this English room.

"It's a harsh speech. He is very uncompromising. He insists that the Sudetens should have self-determination and he swears that he will go to their aid if their grievances are not removed. He is very angry with their treatment by the Czechs, and says they are being tortured. But he does not shut the door to further negotiations—unless other incidents happen which he could not endure with further patience."

"It doesn't sound very good," said Peter Langdon gravely. "It doesn't sound very helpful."

His son Paul looked up and laughed.

"Oh, well," he said, "if we have to die, let us do so with dignity, and a sense of humour, and the sure conviction that England always wins the last battle."

"What is this talk of dying?" asked Altendorf. "Hitler has not declared war. He leaves the door open. Did I not tell you?"

His daughter Anna was looking like one of the ladies in a Wagnerian opera, blonde and mystical.

"What Hitler says is always right!" she said dreamily. "He is marvellous. He does not wish to hurt anyone, but he warns the world of our mighty strength and the shining spades of German youth digging for the defence of the Fatherland."

Paul turned off the radio and threatened to suffocate his cousin with a silk cushion.

LII

ALTENDORF had described Hitler's speech at Nüremberg as somewhat harsh. When it was read next day in London and Paris and Rome and Prague and in all other countries of the world, aware now that this was the crisis which might lead to catastrophe, its words were searched for their inner significance of peace or war in the mind of that man who had spoken them—that mysterious, inexplicable man named Adolf Hitler, who, by some power within himself and by the spirit of the German race, had emerged from obscurity as the leader of his people and as a tremendous portent in Europe. This one man of humble origin who had begun his political career in Munich beer taverns now held in his own hand the decision which might cause the death of millions of men and women and the destruction of densely populated cities. Could anyone, even those very close to him, read the workings of his brain? They might whisper into his ear, they might urge caution upon him, they might be conscious of forces stirring beyond their power of control, but he alone would decide and give orders. His anger, his impatience, his contempt, or his uncanny awareness of the decisive moment for swift action might override all advice and lead him to make some ultimatum which would fling the world's youth into the furnace fires of war.

In this speech there was no ultimatum, but no message of good hope for those who had prayed that he would give an assurance of peaceful intent. There was no sweetness in it, but the harsh contempt of a man who seemed to believe that

he was being tricked, the indignation of a man who seemed to believe that people of his blood were being tortured and outraged, and the menace of a man who had at his command an irresistible force of armed strength. He spoke of three million Czechs torturing three and a half million Germans, though Czech police were being killed by Sudeten Germans during frontier incidents and tavern brawls with casualties on both sides.

He was angry with the democracies and accused them of accepting the lies of German enemies. There had been, he said, a campaign of lies from Prague accusing Germany of mobilizing armies on the Czech frontiers in the previous May, though no German soldier had been moved. His answer to that had been to increase his Air Force and to order the construction of the most gigantic fortresses in the world for the defence of his western front.

"I shall not suffer the oppression of the Sudeten Germans," he shouted in a passage that brought all his young braves to their feet with storms of cheering. "These tactics of giving small bribes and mere phrases will not do. The Germans demand self-determination. This is not a question of Dr. Benes giving a present to the Sudeten Germans. If the democratic countries are of a different opinion the consequences will be serious. I warn them!"

Was that a threat of war? It did not go as far as that, but it was a warning and a menace not to be unheeded by those statesmen and generals in France and other democratic countries who might be tempted to think that Hitler was bluffing.

This speech did not confront Europe with instant war, but in its tone and temper was the spirit of a man who was sure of his own strength, who would not be thwarted. There were people who read it with the knowledge that another incident on that Czech frontier—the killing of a few Sudetens, a street riot in a frontier village—would be the signal for a war which might involve every nation in Europe, as once

before twenty years ago, when an Austrian Archduke was killed at Serajevo. Hitler meant to move if that should happen. The German Army would move.

What about France, and Russia, and England? France was pledged to defend the frontiers of Czechoslovakia against armed invasion. Russia was pledged to defend Czechoslovakia if France acted with her. Would Russia move—that mysterious, unknown Russia of Stalin, who lately had executed many of his generals, many of his admirals, all the Old Guard Bolsheviks, thousands of small officials and administrators, for no reason convincing to the world outside?

And England? Would England call to her sons for voluntary service in a war not directly attacking her own interests, for a country to whom she was in no way pledged? Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain, had made it clear to Germany that if Czechoslovakia were invaded by force of arms, all questions of negotiation and reasonable compromise would go down before an act of war. England would stand by France.

LIII

THE immediate results of Hitler's speech at Nuremberg were ominous. Serious rioting was reported from Sudeten areas, and the Czech Government had imposed martial law throughout those districts.

On the following day Henlein, the Sudeten leader, sent an ultimatum to President Benes demanding the immediate revocation of martial law, the withdrawal of the Czech police, and the confinement of troops to barracks.

President Benes ignored this ultimatum, and threatened to arrest Henlein, who fled with other leaders.

In London the Cabinet was in constant session and it was attended by the War Minister, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Minister for Air, accompanied by their Chiefs of Staff.

The Prime Minister was receiving the leaders of the Opposition Parties.

In France the Sudeten ultimatum seemed to be a stunning blow to all hopes of negotiation between the Sudetens and Czechs. There were strong rumours in French political circles, afterwards confirmed, that M. Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, had sent an urgent plea to the British Government that Lord Runciman should be asked to produce, without a moment's delay, some alternative basis of negotiation. Otherwise, in French opinion, the situation would get out of control and war would be inevitable.

In all the capitals of the world deep concern was being revealed as every day and almost every hour increased the

gravity of this international tension. In Washington Mr. Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, was in frequent communication with President Roosevelt, who was at the bedside of his son in Rochester, Minnesota, and no secret was being made of the official conviction that every despatch from Europe contained another warning that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were getting ready for another ride.

Wall Street, always a sensitive barometer of world events, showed signs of intense nervousness, and the news of the Sudeten ultimatum to the Czech Government caused a sharp break in the last hours of trading.

Everywhere in Europe the peoples were waiting for any scrap of news which might give them a gleam of light in this settling gloom beyond which might come the red flames and fury of war—which none of them wanted, which all of them regarded with horror as it came nearer while the clocks of time were ticking.

It was on the evening of September 14th that a gleam of hope flashed across the dark horizon and brought a sudden sense of respite. John Barton was one of those millions who heard it with a sudden gasp of astonishment and relief. He had been about all day trying to gather impressions and information. His impressions had been only of one colour, which was black. The crowds in Downing Street, watching the coming and going of Ministers, looked anxious and strained. Standing among them for a little while, he spoke to an elderly man with an empty sleeve pinned across his chest who stared at these comings and goings with a look of sombre interest.

"What do you make of it?" asked John.

The man was startled by this sudden question, but answered after a moment's hesitation:

"It carries my mind back. It's like August 1914." He glanced down at his empty sleeve and spoke again.

"It's less than twenty years ago since I lost this arm in a war which was supposed to be a war to end war! Before it

ended we all knew it was a war which had put civilization into the mud."

A middle-aged woman was listening, and joined in this conversation.

"If I thought it would happen again I should paste up the windows and put on the gas. Why wait for the bombs?"

"No, I wouldn't do that," said another woman. "I don't believe in surrender. We shall all have to stick it out."

A haggard-looking man with a scarf round his neck expressed his view on the situation.

"What we've got to do is to stand up to the dictators. There'll be no peace in the world until we get rid of Mussolini and the 'Foorer'."

"The Germans don't want to fight," said a young woman in a ridiculous little hat perched over one eye. "They want peace, same as we do. It's the newspapers that make all the trouble. One can't believe a word that they say. Them newspaper men are just parasites squirting out poison!"

John Barton, who was a newspaper man, refrained from putting up a defence of his profession. He moved away from Downing Street.

Later in the day he heard alarming rumours which increased his sense of gloom. Bryan Feversham, who was in close touch with diplomatic circles, and not without private sources of information by way of the wives and daughters of "People in the Know", dramatized the situation for him in a corner of the lounge of the Green Park Hotel.

"Unless something happens within the next five hours to break the tension," he said, "nothing will stop another world war."

John looked at his wrist-watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon by Greenwich time.

"Where do you get that from?" he asked. "Why five hours?"

Bryan lowered his voice after a glance round the lounge

of the hotel, where two or three groups of his compatriots were talking earnestly.

"The German troops will cross the Czech frontier to-night," he said, "unless something happens before nine o'clock. I can't tell you any more than that."

He had some other items of information of no bright hue.

Some funny stuff, he said, was going on behind the scenes in France. There was a pro-peace party, led by Flandin, trying to back away from the pledge to defend Czechoslovakia. The Communists and the Left were all for a war against Hitler's Germany. There was a struggle going on. Daladier, the Prime Minister, was trying to get some other form of compromise which would keep the peace in Europe.

"France is not in too good shape," said Bryan. "Even from a military point of view, I mean. The French military experts don't think they could rescue the Czechs if the war starts. It would cost them a million men to break through the German lines. Just as it would cost the Germans a million men or more to break the Maginot Line. Meanwhile, the Czechs would be annihilated. Prague would be a rubble of ruin. Nations would be fighting each other to the death years after Czechoslovakia had disappeared from the map."

"What about Russia?" asked John.

Bryan Feversham didn't think much of Russia.

"They'll send some 'planes into Czechoslovakia," he said, "but nothing like their full strength. They're afraid of Japan. They won't try to smash their way through Poland or Rumania. They'll wait until Germany, France and England have exhausted themselves. Then they'll advance over the dead. Europe will go Communist—what's left of Europe."

"A lovely prospect," said John. "I must say you're a cheerful prophet. I find your conversation very heartening on the edge of hell's delight."

Bryan Feversham shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'm telling you. That's how it is. Now I must get back for the next rush of cablegrams."

John took a taxi to his office. He had his own despatch to write, but somehow the words wouldn't come. He stared at the blank sheet on his typewriter. What was the good of words when Europe was about to go up in flames? He was deeply anxious about Judy and his mother and Lucy and her small boy. They ought to get away from the danger-zone. Perhaps already it was too late. It might not be possible to get berths on an American boat. Bunches of Americans were already leaving London and Paris and hurrying back from all parts of the Continent. Judy and his mother might be trapped in this hell's cauldron.

Before he started writing he stared at the blank piece of paper in front of him and saw on it the pictures of that war which Bryan Feversham said would start that night. The black bats of death would be flying through the darkness. In a few hours from this time the first bombs would crash over Prague and its huddled houses. Czech 'planes would be out over Dresden and other German cities. The sky over Europe would be red with the glow of fires. French troops, as he knew, were already moving into the Maginot Line, though a general mobilization had not yet been called. Paris would be one of the targets of this war—that city through which he had walked not long ago with remembrance of its history, watching its people. There would be no chatter and laughter outside the Dôme café. The artists and their models would be listening to the first howls of the sirens before the black bats dropped their eggs.

How soon would it be before London was attacked? Fifteen hundred German bombers had been ear-marked for London, according to his information. They would go for the docks and the factories and the government offices. But they would fly high, and their bombs would be scattered over a wide zone of death. St. Leonard's Terrace would be in the danger-line because of the silver windings of the Thames,

which would be the guide-line for German pilots. They would drop incendiary bombs as well as high explosives. There would be another Great Fire of London. Millions of people would try to escape. They would fight for the Underground trains and get jammed in the subways, panic-stricken. Hordes would go streaming out of London by every road and in every kind of car. Millions, from a city of nine millions, would struggle to find some way of escape out of a city of horror and great death.

There would be another flight of refugees in a world crowded with refugees, trying to find sanctuary. There would be English refugees from poison gas and the spreading flames of densely populated areas. They would go out to woods and heaths like hunted creatures. They would carry their children with them, trudging through the darkness and rain. There would be frightful epidemics, and starvation, and every kind of misery in this England. Not a pretty picture to see on a blank piece of paper waiting for some words to be tapped out on a typewriter!

Those who talked about "standing up to the dictators" hadn't yet realized the meaning of it all. He had done some talking of that kind; he had talked about calling Hitler's bluff. He had leaned in sympathy to the Czechs, though formerly he had been in favour of a revision of a treaty which had put millions of alien people under Czech rule. But it wouldn't help the Czechs if this war happened. They would be the first to get killed. For them it would be annihilation. Was it necessary for English honour or French honour to engage in a war for the sake of keeping three million Sudeten Germans inside a frontier which ought never to have been drawn on the map of Europe? Honour? A fine word. A noble word. But where would honour stand when civilization was a mass of smoking ruins, with its population hiding in cellars and under the debris of its old cathedrals and palaces and hotels and shops? The point and principle of honour which would be invoked on both sides at the start

of this war would be long forgotten in blood and hatred and cruelty and sacrifice before it finished. There would be no victory for dictatorship and none for democracy. There would only be a victory for the devils of hell over all spiritual ideals and all moral values. Those Germans didn't want to fight the English, but they would march to their doom in loyalty to their leader. The English people wanted peace above all things, but they would fight to the last ditch if once they were engaged. The old spirit would move in them. They would "stick it out", as that woman had said in the crowd.

It was the old man-trap. It was the old madness. The world was going mad again, as twenty years ago, according to their records. His own people would get into it before then. All that talk of isolation would be washed out in blood.

John Barton started writing, but none of these things of this apocalyptic vision. He wrote down some of his impressions of the English crowd in Downing Street, and of English public opinion, as far as he knew it. He wrote about the calm demeanour of the people, and their refusal to believe that war would come, and their lack of hatred for the German people, and their bewilderment because they could see no real cause for war. It was poor stuff he was writing. He could get no emotion into it, though his own mind was passing through an emotional crisis, shaking his principles and prejudices and the very foundations of his faith in the clear-cut issues of life—liberty versus tyranny, democracy versus dictatorship, the sacred duty of dying, if need be, for an ideal. Not that he wanted to die in this European quarrel. It would be the women and children who would die mostly, knowing nothing of the causes of this massacre. God! What was he writing?

He looked up at the clock. It was ten minutes past nine.

Five hours had gone since Bryan had said something about the time limit.

Old Man Franklin Speed had come into his room and said something with suppressed emotion.

"Big news, Barton! Just come through."

John felt something tight about his heart, and asked a question in a harsh, strained voice.

"War?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Speed in his dry way. "A respite. Chamberlain is going to see Hitler."

"Jesus Christ!" exclaimed John.

"Exactly," said Mr. Speed. "An answer to prayer perhaps. Anyhow, Mr. Chamberlain is behaving like a Christian gentleman. And I want you to get up early and see him off from Heston. He may say something."

LIV

THAT first flight of the British Prime Minister stirred the imagination of the world. In all countries a great tide of praise and thankfulness rose up to him because he had broken all precedents and all traditions of his high office, risking dignity and pride for the sake of world peace. It was known that if he had not made that proposal to get in direct touch with Hitler, German troops would have been on their way to the Czech frontiers. It was an eleventh-hour flight for peace.

John Barton was among the journalists and friends who saw him off and studied his personality in this great moment of his life. John had seen him in the House of Commons, but only from the distance of the Press or the Strangers' Gallery. This man who had the destiny of the world on his shoulders—as far as he could influence that other man who was waiting for him at Berchtesgaden—was almost comically typical of the English business man—a chief accountant, a bank manager, the city man moulded by tradition and convention. With his winged collar revealing his Adam's apple and a loose tie below his collar-stud, and a dark suit and an umbrella, he had nothing in common with the leaders of the Totalitarian States like Hitler or Mussolini. He was the world's hero that morning, but did not look heroic. He had conceived this dramatic act in the terrific drama now being played out to an unknown end, but there was no man in the world less dramatic in appearance or mentality. He was perfectly self-possessed and had an amused twinkle in his eyes as he received an early-morning ovation from the small crowd at Heston.

Before getting into the aeroplane he spoke a few words in front of a microphone very simply and straightforwardly.

"I'm going to meet the German Chancellor," he said, "because the present situation seems to me to be one in which discussions between him and me may have useful consequences. My policy has always been to try to ensure peace, and the Führer's ready acceptance of my suggestion encourages me to hope that my visit to him will not be without results."

He smiled and raised his hand and went into the aeroplane with two officials who were accompanying him, while cheers were raised by the group of men in the field, among whom were several Germans from the Embassy and German journalists.

The leader of the cheers was a tall, pale-faced, clean-shaven man, who took off his bowler hat and waved it high above his head and cheered with fervour. It was Lord Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the closest collaborator with the Prime Minister for peace in Europe. . . . It was these two men who had decided upon the policy of appeasement which had led to the resignation of Anthony Eden and much lurid criticism from His Majesty's Opposition, which had once been in favour of peace. Now he cheered his Chief on this first flight into the unknown, which would take him into the presence of that strange being who by some secret genius and power within himself had made himself leader of the German folk and now threatened to lead back one of their lost tribes from another State, if need be by force of arms at the risk of a world war.

"Hip, hip, hooray!" The cheers rang out across a misty field as the aeroplane skidded across the grass, and rose and flew away.

One of the Germans who had witnessed the departure of the Prime Minister spoke to John Barton, after raising his hat.

"Good morning! How do you do?"

It was Helmut von Metzen, whom John had met with

Anne Ede, and who had just returned to England to write about the crisis.

John answered his greeting somewhat coldly.

"This is a magnificent gesture for peace," said the young man enthusiastically. "It will have a very great effect in Germany, and I am sure that Hitler will get on well with Mr. Chamberlain. It may be a turning-point in world history."

"It's time something turned," said John gloomily. "Your Mr. Hitler seems to want a world war."

The young German looked at him sharply and then laughed uneasily.

"No! I don't believe that. But I admit that the situation is serious. We hear this morning that Henlein has refused the latest Czech offers and demands union with Germany for his Sudetens. Dr. Benes has ordered his arrest, but he has already escaped."

"He does what Hitler tells him, no doubt," said John dryly.

Helmut seemed aware of a slight hostility from this American journalist.

"The whole German people want peace," he said gravely. "I am convinced that we shall avoid war, which would be the most terrible calamity."

He hesitated for a moment, raised his hat again, and turned to one of his friends.

The world's Press and public opinion revealed the startling effect on all minds of this dramatic pursuit of peace. In the United States the sense of drama was uppermost. It beat every film story on record.

"It's a race against catastrophe," said one journal.

"It has an epic quality," wrote the *New York Times*, "of a magnificent gamble for the highest stakes in the world."

"The English Prime Minister," said M. Blum, the French Socialist leader, "shows a noble audacity in the cause of peace."

"Mr. Chamberlain's heroic flight," said John Barton's own

paper, "is using the victory of aviation for the first time in the service of Christ and the spirit of peace. The peoples of Europe should go down on their knees while this last bid for peace is being made by a man of knightly courage, whose name is Neville Chamberlain."

In an old shrine of English history people were on their knees, at this time, and day by day afterwards during the two terrible weeks. Judy Barton from Massachusetts was one of them. She crept that day into Westminster Abbey and knelt for a few minutes in its twilight, looking up to one of the rose windows through which there came a patchwork of rich colours touching one of the columns. Many people were there and others came in and moved about noiselessly before they knelt. They were mostly women. Many of them were nurses in uniform. Most of them were middle-aged or elderly women. They had been through a war twenty years ago. They had known its losses and its agonies. They were the mothers of dead sons, the sisters of dead brothers. They knew the meaning of war. A woman next to Judy was weeping quietly and Judy had the impulse to hold her hand, but restrained herself.

"These people," she thought, "will be my people when I marry Robin. I feel one of them now. We Americans of the old stock belong to them. Perhaps Robin will have to be killed. Perhaps we shall die together in that studio where I've been so happy."

At that moment she had no fear of death.

LV

JOHN BARTON and other journalists of other nations were in the field at Heston when the British Prime Minister returned from his interview with Hitler. As he stepped out of the aeroplane he looked cheerful and raised his hand and smiled at a group of colleagues who awaited him.

One of the men who greeted him was Dr. Kordt, the German Chargé d'Affaires, who wrung his hand warmly and spoke with great emotion, hoping that his mission had been successful.

"At any rate," he said, "you have conquered the heart of my countrymen."

News had already reached London that the Prime Minister had been given a tremendous ovation by the German crowds in Munich and that they had raised storms of cheers with shouts of "*Heil !*" on his arrival and departure.

A letter was handed to him as he alighted at Heston. It was from the King, and he read it attentively before handing it to one of his officials. Then he spoke a few words.

"Yesterday," he said, "I had a long talk with Herr Hitler. It was a frank talk, but it was a friendly one, and I feel satisfied now that each of us fully understands what is in the mind of the other.

"You won't expect me to discuss what may be the result of these talks. What I have got to do is to discuss them with my colleagues, and I would advise you not to accept prematurely any unauthorized account of what took place in these conversations. I shall be discussing them to-night with my

colleagues and others, especially with Lord Runciman. Later—perhaps in a few days—I'm going to have another talk with Herr Hitler, only this time he has told me that it is his intention to come half-way to meet me."

"I hope those last words are symbolical," said an English journalist who shared a car with John Barton and two others, following the Prime Minister's car to London. There were crowds waiting for him in Downing Street and he went into No. 10 to the sound of their cheers.

"Is it peace?" shouted a man in the crowd, but no answer was given to this.

No answer came as the days followed—thirteen days of tremendous strain upon all the peoples of Europe because of continued uncertainty and unceasing preparations for war. The British people were left almost entirely without information from their Government. No official spokesman came to tell them over the microphone what plans were being discussed, what was being accepted or refused, what was the cause of increasing danger. There was nothing official to which they could hold fast as the basis of their discussions about this problem of the minorities in Czechoslovakia which threatened their own lives. What they heard came from foreign sources of information in Paris and Rome and Prague and could not be trusted. French journalists seemed to know. They published summaries of an Anglo-French pact which had for its foundation the cession of the Sudeten Germans and their land from Czechoslovakia and their union with the German Reich. It was, they said—truly, as afterwards appeared—the recommendation made to Chamberlain by Lord Runciman, who, having tried to mediate between the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans, was at last convinced that no compromise was possible, and that complete cession was the only way to peace.

Already there were murmurs from the Left in England and France that this would be a betrayal of Czechoslovakia and a surrender to the bullying demands of dictatorship. In Paris the Communists of the French Chamber were denouncing the

Anglo-French plan as a base and cowardly act of treachery. They demanded the fulfilment of French pledges even at the risk of war, and at whatever cost of life.

It looked as though they would get this war, the English and French politicians, who had once been pacifists and had denounced the Treaty of Versailles, but whose hatred of Hitler and all dictatorships (except that of Russia) stirred them with fury and made them desire war more than peace.

The French Premier, Daladier, and M. Bonnet, his Foreign Minister, had flown over to London, and after discussion lasting through the day, which was a Sunday, until past midnight, had emerged looking pale and grave. They had smoked innumerable cigarettes. They had taken part in long conversations through interpreters. They had an air of exhaustion when they handed a joint communiqué to the waiting journalists.

"Full agreement has been reached as to a peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak problem."

But in Prague the Czech Prime Minister had addressed his nation in a broadcast message saying that the Republic would accept neither a plebiscite nor a cession of the Sudeten German territory by any other means.

Across the border an ex-gymnastic instructor named Konrad Henlein was raising a Free Corps of Volunteers among the Sudeten refugees. A hundred thousand of them had now fled into Germany and threatened to attack across the Czech frontier for the "rescue" of their folk.

In Trieste a hundred thousand people listened on that Sunday morning to the far-carrying voice of Mussolini.

"The solution of the problem which is now tormenting Europe," he shouted, "has only one name—Plebiscites . . . Plebiscites for all the nationalities which want them."

From a hundred thousand voices came the answering shout:

"Duce! Duce! Duce!"

"We still hope even in this last hour for a peaceful issue," said Mussolini in his voice of brass. "The British Prime

Minister has been a flying messenger of peace. But we hope that if peace is not possible the conflict may be localized. If that is not possible Italy knows on which side she will be."

He did not say which side.

News was reaching the people of Berlin of troop movements on a large scale in the region of Leipzig. The German people were getting anxious. What is all this about? they asked. What does it mean? War? But Hitler had promised peace. Were their sons to be sent into the furnace of war for the sake of those Sudeten Germans who had never been German—Bohemian Germans for centuries—part of the Austrian Empire?

LVI

THERE was a sense of mystery and bewilderment in the millions of minds watching and waiting for some revelation of the essential facts in this crisis of history.

One of those minds, highly intelligent, deeply anxious, utterly bewildered, was that of Peter Langdon, the novelist. Several times during recent days he had rung up John Barton, believing that he had special sources of information as an American journalist in London, and one night—it was getting on for midnight—he called round at John's house and asked to see him if he had returned from his office.

"Come right in," said John, who had opened the front door in answer to a hesitating knock.

"I feel ashamed of disturbing you," said Langdon. "You must be utterly exhausted. But the truth is I'm finding the strain of this crisis almost intolerable, and I can't get any light in its darkness. What do you make of it—to-night?"

It was the night of Friday, September 23rd, following the day when Chamberlain had flown for his second visit to Hitler at Godesberg, on the Rhine. Over the wireless had come the news that conversations begun the previous day between Hitler and Chamberlain had been broken off and that the British Prime Minister had decided to return to London by air next morning. It was possible that he would pay a farewell visit to Hitler before leaving.

"I can't say it looks good," said John. "The Czechs are mobilizing. The new Czech Premier, Sirovy, has issued orders

for mobilization. The news came to Hitler while Mr. Chamberlain was actually talking with Hitler."

"God help us!" said Langdon.

He looked like a man who had been on the rack of mental torture, and John felt a sense of pity for him. He had used his pen in the service of peace. All his novels had been on lines of idealism and human brotherhood. He had been an advocate of the League of Nations and of all attempts to establish law and justice in Europe. Now he saw that his pen had written futile words, or words at least which had utterly failed. All his ideals had been frustrated one by one. His argument for reason and intelligence had got nowhere. The League of Nations was on the scrap-heap of historical failures, not because its purpose was wrong, but because it had never been fulfilled on account of national insincerities, fears and self-interest. Now this man who had tried to light a little lamp in a world of darkness seemed utterly dejected.

"I'm worrying about Paul," he said, as though excusing himself for his gloominess. "I'm worrying about all the Pauls of Europe—those boys who will be lagged for this war, if it happens."

He laughed for a moment and looked less stricken.

"My household," he said, "is in a state of high tension. My wife's sister is getting frightened, although she pooh-poohed the idea of war until a few days ago. Her German husband is beginning to have doubts of Hitler's intentions. Anna, of course, is certain that Hitler will do the right and noble thing."

"Won't you have a drink?" said John. "You look in need of it, and I guess one wouldn't do me any harm."

Langdon made a gesture of refusal.

"It's not drink I want. It's illumination! I can't make head or tail of all this. What's the cause of this breakdown at Godesberg? The Anglo-French Plan seems to give Hitler all he has been asking for. And the Czechs have agreed to it, haven't they? Then, what's all the trouble about?"

John admitted that he was equally in the dark. Messages were coming through from Godesberg stating, unofficially, that Hitler had presented Chamberlain with demands which went far beyond the Anglo-French Plan and contained a time limit for their fulfilment.

"It looks as though he wants to smash the Czech State," said John. "It looks as though he wants to use his tanks and aeroplanes and other bright little toys, not because he loves the Sudetens, but because he hates the Czechs. Perhaps that's the key to the situation."

Langdon considered that point of view, but rejected it.

"Altendorf tells me that Hitler hates the idea of war and wants to get his victories without blood."

John allowed himself a moment of irony.

"He looks like doing it. If England and France won't fight in any cause whatever it makes it an easy game for him. He's on velvet."

Langdon looked at him with a mild rebuke in his eyes.

"Isn't that an unfair way of putting it? It rather looks to me as if we *are* going to fight—in a cause which doesn't seem to me very good. Do you want this war to happen, then?"

John answered uneasily after a slight groan:

"I do not. But isn't it necessary to resist a bully who keeps raising his price and threatening the use of force?"

Langdon made a gesture of disagreement.

"One doesn't want to drench the world in blood because one party to an argument bangs his fist on the table and threatens to use a gun. Isn't that what Chamberlain is trying to prevent?"

"By surrender?" asked John.

"Surrender of what, my dear fellow?"

"The surrender of democracy to dictatorship."

Langdon spoke then with a kind of angry intensity, which was rare in his way of speech.

"I hate those vague, heroic-sounding phrases! It's the stuff our Labour Party keeps on talking. It means absolutely

nothing, especially when they look to Russia as one of the democracies to aid them in a war for liberty, which, if it happens, will be to prevent three million people obtaining the right of self-determination. All that seems to me grossly illogical and deeply hypocritical. Chamberlain is striving for peace on lines of intelligent compromise and conciliation. I hope to God he will succeed."

John was silent for a few moments. Intellectually he had forced himself to this viewpoint. A thousand times he had argued it out to himself and to others during the last few months, but always there surged up in him the primitive instinct of resistance to a threat of force, and a hatred of these new dictatorships against which his American mind revolted. If a man threatened to use a clenched fist he had an instinctive desire to punch his nose. Perhaps in international affairs that instinct had to be restrained.

"Is there any chance of getting some late news?" asked Langdon.

"I'll get in touch with the office," said John.

He rang up the *Observer* office and Langdon listened and heard him give a sharp exclamation, followed by gloomy words:

"Hell! I'm sorry to hear that. . . . No, it's not a lovely world! . . . But it's all very interesting!"

He said good night and put down the receiver.

"Bad news?" asked Langdon anxiously.

"Not bright," said John. "Chamberlain can't accept Hitler's new demands. They amount to an ultimatum with October 1st as a time limit. He's flying back to-morrow without the dove of peace!"

"As you say," said Langdon, "it doesn't look too good."

"I hear the hoofs of the Four Horsemen," said John. "General Sirovy, the Czech Premier, has ordered general mobilization."

Peter Langdon stood up and walked to the window in a restless way and then turned and spoke gravely:

"That looks like a challenge. It may give Germany the excuse to march."

John nodded, and gave some more information which had come to him over the telephone :

"Meanwhile the Czechs are manning their frontiers and there are excited scenes in Prague."

Langdon stood looking into John's eyes.

"Is it all going to happen again?" he asked. "Will my son Paul have to suffer the same agony I did twenty years ago? My brilliant son, with all life ahead of him! No, I can't believe it."

His face turned deadly pale and he put his hand to his heart as though he had been stabbed and was bleeding inwardly.

"Steady, old man!" said John, going towards him.

Langdon pulled himself together with an effort.

"I refuse to believe it's going to happen," he said. "I utterly refuse to believe it."

He spoke angrily as though in defiance of all the devils who were arranging this slaughter of the world youth again.

"I believe in God," he said. "I believe in the divinity of the human spirit. I believe in the intelligence of the common folk of this world. They won't allow this to happen."

Suddenly he forced himself into a kind of false cheerfulness.

"I'm rather ashamed of myself, my dear fellow! Forgive me. For a moment I allowed a morbid imagination to get the better of me. Of course it's all nonsense. We're not going to have this war."

"I'm happy to hear you say so," said John. "That's fine!"

"Well, good night and a thousand thanks," said Langdon. "I ought not to have bothered you like this, but one gets absurdly over-anxious."

"I'm glad you came in," said John.

He went into the hall with Langdon and let him out of the house.

Then he went back into his own room and stood there for several minutes motionless before switching off the light and going up to bed.

"It's getting closer," he said aloud. "It's getting damn close!"

LVII

THE next day was ominous. Mr. Chamberlain had returned looking tired. The inner Cabinet was in constant session. There was a coming and going of Ministers of State, Admirals and Generals and Air-Marshals. From Germany came news of troop movements. Anxious crowds in Munich watched the passing of artillery and armoured cars and looked up into the sky and saw bombing aeroplanes flying eastward. In France there were rumours of various differences in the Government. Three Ministers had sent in their resignations. It was the beginning of a split between those who were bringing pressure on Prague to agree to the German terms and those on the Extreme Left who were for war at any price with the aid of Russia. Meanwhile a partial mobilization of the French Army was going on secretly and troops were moving up to the Maginot Line.

In Czechoslovakia all men under forty had been called to arms. The frontiers had been closed, and this State of mixed races, with excited minorities demanding their liberation from Czech rule—Hungarians and Ruthenians, and Poles and Slovaks, as well as the Sudeten Germans—were isolated from the rest of Europe. The last messages reaching the outside world from Prague announced that the Czech people rejected the new German demands put in the form of an ultimatum and were ready to fight to the death—as death it would be for themselves, their women and their children. The German Press, working like a megaphone for Dr. Goebbels, the arch-propagandist, was surpassing all its previous fury of denuncia-

tion and abuse. No longer was it directed to the sufferings of the Sudetens and their claim to self-determination. It was now a blast of hatred against the Czech State itself, which, they said, must be smudged out from the map of Europe so that it should no longer form the spearhead of Bolshevism in alliance with Soviet Russia.

The actual conditions of the Godesberg ultimatum which Hitler had presented to Chamberlain, surprising and shocking that messenger of peace, had reached the newspaper offices. John Barton, as a newspaper man, had read those terms in his own office and discussed them with his Chief, that dry-mannered old man, Mr. Franklin Speed, for whose judgment John had come to have high respect.

"They're pretty rough," said Mr. Speed. "They couldn't be worse if the Czechs had already been defeated. They cut the Czech railway system to bits. They allow the Germans to march in and occupy the ceded districts without any guarantee for the remaining areas. The Czechs would hand over all their fortifications and be utterly defenceless. Civilians aren't allowed to withdraw any of their property, not even a cow or a pig. It's the naked conquest of armed might."

"I guess it means war," said John. "It means that Hitler prefers war to peace. May he burn in hell!"

Franklin Speed smiled faintly at these heated words.

"It's best to keep cool," he said. "We don't know what's passing in Hitler's mind. He may be banking on a bloodless victory, knowing that England and France are very reluctant to fight. I should say he used to play poker in the Munich beer taverns. I have an idea that he's the greatest poker-player in the world. But I wouldn't be a hundred per cent sure that he's bluffing. It might be unsafe to call his bluff. We shall know more about it this evening. He's speaking at the Sports Palace in Berlin. There's just a chance he may keep the door open for further negotiations."

John Barton stood up from the desk and spoke with a sudden flame of anger and emotion:

"Negotiations! How can one negotiate with an Al Capone? Isn't there only one answer to this threat of force—this insistence on armed invasion—when he has been offered everything he demanded with the guarantee of England?"

"What's the answer?" asked Franklin Speed dryly.

"If Hitler wants war, let him have war," said John. "Let him have it like hell. But I'm afraid these English folk want peace at any price."

Mr. Speed glanced sharply at John and then spoke in his quiet New England way:

"I dare say lots of us Americans are talking like that," he said. "It's easy for us, three thousand miles away and keeping strictly neutral! I'd think more of it if we sent a note to Mr. Chamberlain to say we're in on the first day."

John was silent, and his Chief went on speaking in a quiet monologue:

"England and France may be forced to fight, but I'm hoping that something may happen to prevent it. As a religious man, with occasional lapses into infidelity as a newspaper man, I'm saying my prayers again on behalf of Mr. Chamberlain. If this war happens it wouldn't help much, if any. The Czechs will be wiped out in blood. The city of Prague, which is quite a nice place—Mrs. Speed and I were there last year—will be a scrap-heap of ruins and human bodies. Neither France nor England can get anywhere near them in time for rescue. Then the war will go on until European civilization has gone like other civilizations before it. There won't be much left of its ancient treasures. Before the end the original cause of war will have been forgotten. No good will come out of it. In my considered opinion, no good comes out of evil. I believe I have authority for that."

John Barton could find no answer. He felt a sense of self-torture. All his democratic instincts were in revolt against any kind of surrender to dictatorship. His vision of what war would mean in horror and massacre forced him to agree with this old newspaper man who spoke like a prophet.

"By the way," said Mr. Speed. "There's bad news from New England. There's been a big wind blowing. From the reports coming in it looks like the biggest blow that has ever struck the Atlantic seaboard. It's considerable loss of life and property, and I'm afraid some of our friends may be in deep waters."

It was the first news of a calamity which in the United States put even the war news into the second place for a day or two.

"I'm afraid God has a grudge against humanity," said John, wondering whether his own house over there in Massachusetts stood up against the wind and water.

"Well," said Mr. Speed, "we're apt to blame a lot of things on God."

He rose from his desk and went over to John and put his hand on his shoulder.

"You're working under a strain," he said; "it's men with imagination and fine sensibilities who are suffering most in this crisis. I'm a dry old stick, but even I begin to find this tension very trying. It's going to leave its mark on us."

"Do you think I've got the jitters?" asked John.

"I don't think so," said Mr. Speed. "And that's why I'm going to mention one point which needs a cool judgment. In my view the time has arrived when all who can get out of this country ought to go. I'm thinking of your mother and sister. There's a boat leaving for New York on Wednesday. It may be the last boat before England is at war. There's nothing against your taking your mother and sister back to safety. There's everything in favour of it."

"Do you mean I should go with them?" asked John.

"I do," said Mr. Speed. "You're too young, John, to be the victim of an air raid in a war that isn't ours. My advice to you is to take that boat on Wednesday with your mother and Miss Judy. Think it over. But you'll have to think darned quick."

"Are you staying here?" asked John.

Mr. Speed nodded.

"Mrs. Speed and I have decided to stay on, whatever happens. We're getting towards the end of our days. Nothing matters much as far as we are concerned. But it's different for you, with the promise of life ahead. See what I mean?"

"I'm not going," said John.

"Well, maybe," said Mr. Speed, "there won't be any war, anyhow. Mrs. Speed has a hunch about it. She's often right."

LVIII

THERE was a painful evening again at the Langdons'. John had shirked going round there after dinner because he was in a black mood and not inclined to meet the Altendorfs—however friendly to England—a stupidity of which he was himself aware but felt unable to resist. But he was persuaded by Judy and Lucy, who wanted to hear Hitler's speech at the Sportspalast, and by Peter Langdon himself, who gave this invitation over the telephone and asked John to come and give him "moral support". In any case it would be necessary to hear the words which would be spoken in Berlin that night by the man who alone in the world could decide the issue of peace or war. If he wanted war it would be war.

"I'm very hopeful," said Langdon, "that he will withdraw his ultimatum. He must know that the German people hate the idea of war as much as we do. Even now I have some faith in his sense of statesmanship and his desire for the happiness of his own folk. It's inconceivable that he would fling all his great achievements away to plunge Germany into a war which in the long run is bound to lead to his own ruin."

"I admire your optimism," said John quietly.

It was Anna who took up Langdon's last words.

"There's no question of a German defeat, Uncle. The German Army is invincible. The German Air Force is the strongest in the world."

"Be quiet, Anna!" said her father angrily. "You are talking like a child."

"I'm talking like a German girl," said Anna. "I happen to be one."

"Your mother is English," said her father. "Your mother and I have the deepest love for England. It will break our hearts if war happens."

"It's quite all right, Father," said Anna, who had gone a little pale. "Hitler knows that England won't fight, anyhow. He's taking no risk."

Paul, who was in the room, laughed as he fiddled about with the wireless.

"*Heil Hitler!*" he said. "But there's one Englishman who is quite ready to fight if it's strictly necessary. Much as I dislike the idea of losing my young life, you may be interested to know that I have already volunteered for the Air Force. We mayn't put up a very good show, but we shall do our best. It may be my unpleasant duty to bomb you out of bed, dear Anna, when you return to Berlin."

Anna laughed contemptuously.

"You'd never get to Berlin, Paul. Not a chance!"

Paul's father uttered a mild rebuke:

"For heaven's sake, don't talk like that! It sends a shiver down my spine, although I know you are both joking."

"I was talking quite seriously, Uncle," said Anna, looking him straight in the eyes.

For a moment Langdon's face flushed.

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself," he said angrily.

"I'm a German girl," said Anna. "I follow my Führer wherever he leads."

She stood with a little flame in her eyes and her breast heaving. Then suddenly she burst into tears and left the room.

"That's spilt the beans!" said Paul.

"I am sorry, my dear fellow," said Altendorf. "She is very young. You see what a gulf there is between parents and children in Germany!"

It was fortunate that Anna's mother and Paul's were not in the room at the time. They came down from the nursery,

where they had been attending the bathing of little Louis-Philippe.

"Hitler speaks!" said Paul, turning on some frightful noises which resolved themselves into a tornado of cheers and the marching of many feet. Hitler spoke, and his voice sounded harsher than usual and very menacing. From time to time Altendorf translated a few words and gave the gist of certain passages.

Dr. Benes, said Hitler, was a liar. He was a born liar and he went on lying. He was the father of the lie that there was a Czechoslovak nation. To the Führer's demand at Nuremberg for the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans he had answered with more oppression and more shootings.

He spoke of all his peace pacts with European countries.

"I am myself a front-line soldier," he said, "and know how terrible is war. I wished to spare the German people a repetition of that. I thank Mr. Chamberlain for his peace efforts. I have assured him that the German people want only peace. I have given him assurances that after the Sudeten question is regulated we have no further territorial claims to make in Europe. But on the Sudeten German question my patience is at an end. Benes can choose war or peace. He can either accept my offer and give the Germans freedom or we will go and fetch it for them."

At these words, which he repeated in English, Altendorf wiped a little moisture from his forehead, and then rose and walked away from the wireless instrument, which Paul switched off after listening to a storm of cheers which seemed unending.

"What do you make of it?" asked Langdon anxiously.

"I do not know," said Altendorf. "There are many things quite reasonable in the Führer's speech. But those last words frighten me, I confess. Hitler means what he says. He gives October 1st as the limit of his patience. If the Czechs do not accept his terms by that date he will undoubtedly send our troops across the frontier. It is now September 26th. There are only four more days."

"Four more days of jolly life," said Paul. "Let's eat, drink and be merry. Have a sandwich, somebody?"

Nobody laughed, but Judy alone among them gave this boy a smile.

Nobody laughed, but someone wept. It was Frau von Altendorf.

She wept after speaking some tragic words.

"For the second time," she said, "I shall be torn in half between my loyalties and my love. Must I face it again? It's too, too horrible! I couldn't bear it. I would rather be dead."

"*Mein Schatz!*" said Altendorf very tenderly. "*Meine sehr geliebte Frau!*"

He put his arm about her and she wept on his shoulder.

"To-morrow we must go back," said Altendorf.

LIX

THAT night John spoke to Judy and his mother when Lucy had gone up to bed.

"I've been thinking this thing out," he said. "We've got to think hard and quick. Mother, you and Judy must go back to Boston by Wednesday's boat. Now, for the love of Mike, don't argue about it. I'm telling you."

"My dear John," said Mrs. Barton, "I can't be hurried like this. Besides, I don't want to go back."

"I'm staying," said Judy. "I think I told you that before."

"Now, look," said John; "if this war happens you're both going to get killed. No one in this rabbit-warren called London is going to find any safe place when the bombs begin to fall. St. Leonard's Terrace is going to be one of the front seats in hell. Mother, I implore you to be reasonable. Judy, I beg of you to act like an intelligent woman. For Mother's sake you must get that boat."

"I'll see Mother off," said Judy. "But I'm not going, and Mother knows why. I've told her about Robin."

"Yes," said Mrs. Barton, "and I was very glad to hear it. But you're quite mistaken, my dear, if you think I'm going to leave you in England. There are two reasons against it."

"Give me one," said John.

"In the first place it's quite likely that our home is surrounded by water, and I'm not a good swimmer."

"Well," said Judy, "that's a good reason, Mother."

"And in the second place," said Mrs. Barton, "all this talk about war is very foolish, because I happen to know that it

isn't written in the book. The spirit messages are very reassuring."

John left the room and slammed the door. They heard him go up to his bedroom and cross the floor with his heavy tread—the old boards creaked—and open his window before standing still.

"This crisis is getting on John's nerves," said Judy. "He's suffering mental torture about it, and I'm getting a bit nervy myself, Mother. I don't want to die just yet. I'd like to have a little time with Robin."

"You'll have it," said Mrs. Barton.

LX

THE Altendorfs went back to Germany next day after many embraces and some tears. Even Altendorf had tears in his eyes when he grasped the hand of his brother-in-law, and Anna wept with little howls when she flung her arms round Paul and kissed him with a wet cheek. She was very sorry for her outburst of the previous evening, due to her loyalty to the Führer, for whom, she said, she was willing to die on the scaffold or at the stake.

John abstained from saying good-bye to them, and outflanked the taxi as it stood outside the Langdons' little gate to hide himself in the garden of Burton Court until they had departed. It was, he knew, illogical and absurd. But his whole mind was filled at the moment by illogicality, prejudice and angry emotion. He could find no bridge between his hatred and horror of impending war—even his secret conviction that the Sudeten Germans should be given the right of self-determination—and his instinctive repugnance to any form of yielding to the dictatorship of Hitler and the demands of the Godesberg ultimatum.

For the sake of his peace of mind, troubled by these conflicting ideas, it was unfortunate that he should have walked into Burton Court that morning. Something was happening there which for a moment he failed to understand. A number of men had invaded this children's paradise and were digging deep holes in the green turf. Several children stood watching the excavations gravely, and one of them who was his special

friend, Jennifer, suddenly asked one of the workmen what he was doing.

"It's all right, missy," said the man with the spade, "we're only planting a few bulbs. They'll look nice at Christmas."

They were digging trenches in Burton Court, and when he looked into them John Barton felt cold. It was pitiable. It was damnable!

Jennifer slipped her hand into his and spoke gravely:

"I'm rather frightened."

"Why?" asked John. "What's scaring you, Jennifer?"

"I'm old enough to know," she said. "There's going to be a war. My father and mother are sending me away into the country to escape the bombs."

"Well, that's all right," said John cheerfully. "There won't be any bombs in the country."

"I'm not sure," said the little girl. "But what shall I do if Mummy and Daddy are killed in London?"

John felt his heart go soft. He had a great love for all small boys and girls, and Jennifer's fear distressed him.

"Bombs won't kill such nice people as your father and mother," he said, lying to her in a cheerful voice.

She shook her head and refused to believe that lie.

"My uncle was killed in the last war, and Mummy told me he was very nice. There were a million soldiers of ours killed in the war, and they were fine men, so Daddy says."

"I don't think there's going to be a war," said John, lying to her again. "I happen to know someone who told me so. He's very high up. I'm sure he knows."

"I think he's made a mistake," said Jennifer. "If there's not going to be any war, why did we have to try on our gas-masks yesterday? Phyllis was sick afterwards and had to be put to bed. She was awfully frightened. So was I really, but I pretended not to be."

She said good-bye to him and he bent down to kiss her, and then went sharply away from this group of children staring into the trenches which were being dug in their garden.

"May God punish all war-makers," said John within his own soul, forgetting that five minutes before he had been angry at the thought that England and France might try to evade their pledges and surrender to Hitler's threats of force.

There were other trenches being dug in London. He passed some in Eaton Square and others in the Green Park. For the first time in history the English people were digging trenches in their own fields and gardens. It looked as though they had made up their minds that war was coming to them. He watched their faces in the crowds streaming down Whitehall. There was no panic in their eyes. They were grave but outwardly calm, whatever fears might be hidden in their minds. Now and again he heard scraps of conversation between people who passed.

"I've volunteered for A.R.P."

"My brother will be called up again. He's on the reserve."

"I don't believe in these gas-masks. There's no shelter from high explosives."

"The Germans don't want it any more than we do."

"These trenches are a bit of a farce, aren't they? Who's going into them on a wet night? Far better stay indoors and take one's chance."

"I'm sending the kids away. Women and children first. Awful, isn't it?"

"I can't think what all this fuss is about. Hitler has got all he wants, hasn't he? Well, why go on with it?"

The newspaper placards were exhibiting a slogan at every street corner.

"Smile and dig!"

There was not much smiling, but a lot of digging.

In Downing Street the crowds were denser and being kept back by mounted police. The French Ministers were over again. The British Cabinet was sitting continuously.

Chamberlain had issued an early-morning statement, referring to Hitler's speech in the Sportspalast.

"I have read the German Chancellor's speech and I appreci-

ate his references to the efforts I have made to save the peace. I cannot abandon those efforts, since it seems to me incredible that the peoples of Europe who do not want war with one another should be plunged into a bloody struggle over a question on which agreement has already been largely obtained."

He alluded to the apparent fact that Hitler had no faith that the promises would be kept, and he pledged the British Government to make themselves morally responsible for their fulfilment.

"That man Chamberlain has earned a golden crown," thought John. "I take off my hat to him, whatever happens."

Curiously, in the way men's minds work, it was the talk with Jennifer in the garden which had modified his views about a compromise with Hitler.

Another statesman had addressed himself to Hitler, and John read his words with a sudden gleam of hope and a sudden sense of national consciousness. The statesman was Mr. Roosevelt, who had sent a personal appeal to Hitler.

On behalf of the 130,000,000 people of the United States of America [he wrote], and for the sake of humanity everywhere, I most earnestly appeal to you not to break off negotiations, looking to a peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement of the questions at issue. I earnestly repeat that so long as negotiations continue differences may be reconciled. Once they are broken off reason is banished and force produces no solution for the future good of humanity.

"There goes American neutrality!" thought John. "If this thing happens we shall be in—late, no doubt, but perhaps in time to save something."

He walked up Whitehall with those words of Roosevelt's in his mind. Perhaps they would make a difference in this crisis—that mention of 130,000,000 people was more than a hint. It was a reminder.

At the corner of Whitehall opposite the Statue of Charles I he heard his name called out.

It was his friend Harrington, whom he had last met in Vienna on the night when they had escaped from a crazy crowd into a tavern where a hunted Jew came panting.

"I've just flown over from Munich," said Harrington. "Most of the correspondents have left Berlin. We don't want to spend the next seven months in a concentration camp."

"Why seven months?" asked John. "Why not seven years?"

"The war, if it happens, will be over in seven months," said Harrington dogmatically. "By that time Germany will be down-and-out owing to food shortage, a shortage of raw materials, and a revolt of the people. Hitler's star will have fallen."

He led John into one of the clubs in Pall Mall and ordered black coffee for both of them. A number of his fellow-clubmen were absorbed in the morning's papers.

"One thing has happened," he said, "which will make Hitler think rather hard."

"Does he think?" asked John. "I thought he worked by instinct or by secret voices from the pagan gods."

"He has his ear to the ground," said Harrington. "As a dictator he feels the pulse of his people."

"What's the diagnosis?" asked John. "Haven't they all gone gaga?"

Harrington lowered his voice.

"Far from it. They're all horrified by the chance of war. It goes farther than that. I watched the crowds in Munich. There was not a cheer when the troops passed, and even the soldiers looked grim and sullen. The German women are beginning to protest. When Chamberlain came they turned out to cheer him with shrill cries. He is their hero. When he left Godesberg the women of the Rhineland shouted a kind of chant: 'Chamberlain must come back! Chamberlain must come back!' Hitler heard of it. Goebbels heard of it. Ribbentrop heard of it. All over Germany, as I know from friends, the people are aghast at this threat of war. They believed that

Hitler stood for peace. If he leads them into war they will know that he has betrayed them. He won't lead them to war. That war isn't going to happen."

John Barton touched this English newspaper man on the knee as they sat opposite each other.

"I remember something you told me wouldn't happen," he reminded him. "It was the loss of Austrian independence. As a prophet, Harrington, you take too many risks!"

Harrington coloured up for a moment and looked abashed.

"This is different," he said. "Austria was a special case. They wanted to join the Reich."

LXI

As a newspaper man it was John's business to interpret the English people to the American people in this time of crisis, and during these days he seemed to see the soul of England as never before. These people had taken off their masks for a little while, he thought, before putting on their gas-masks. They stood revealed now on the edge of the abyss. There were no heroics. No one spoke of war's "glory" or waved the Union Jack, or shouted jingo slogans of national boasting with abuse and hatred of enemy peoples. All that belonged to the past. There were too many among them who remembered the last war. There was as yet no enemy. On the contrary, there was a curious sense of sympathy for the German people. Not a soul in England, as far as this American observer could find, wanted war with them. Not a soul failed to regard its prospect with a sense of horror, but they were resigning themselves to its abominable ordeal with a kind of cold stoicism and without visible panic. Panic there was, no doubt, in individual hearts, among the fathers and mothers of young sons and in the little houses of the great cities where there would be no bomb-proof shelters for women or babes. Already there was an exodus from London, and John watched a steady stream of motor traffic laden with perambulators and family luggage.

Plans were being improvised and rushed through for the evacuation of 600,000 children to country districts. Heaven alone knew what would happen to them when they got there as regards food, water, and sanitary conditions. The Home Office announced other plans for billeting civilians in towns

and villages outside the danger-zone of the crowded capital. Millions of gas-masks were being distributed as though they were talismans against high explosives. Over the wireless came calls for more volunteers to fight fires and give first-aid.

The London hospitals were preparing to receive vast unknown numbers of casualties, estimated secretly at many thousands a day. At night anti-aircraft guns were being placed in position, but not enough for any secure defence against hostile bombers. The Government had begun their emergency measures too late. The volunteer system was disorderly and inefficient. Democracy up against dictatorship was revealing many weaknesses of organization. It was, as John had once said, a nation of amateurs against professionals; but amateurs who would give a good account of themselves and whose spirit, perhaps, would make up a little for machine-like efficiency. These people knew how to die if they didn't know how to keep alive. It would take a lot to break their spirit from the air. There was a curious calmness about them, steeling themselves for this ordeal by fire, knowing all that it would mean, and facing it with a kind of fatalism. He spoke to working men and taxi-drivers and costers and shop assistants.

"If it comes we shall have to go through with it," said one of the working men.

"It's going to be horrible," said a man behind the counter of a chemist's shop, "but if it happens we shall have to make the best of it."

"We went through hell before," said a man selling newspapers at the corner of Sloane Square, "and I dare say we shall go through hell again, and come out on the other side—if there is any other side."

"I don't know what it's all about," said a young fellow at a greengrocer's stall in the King's Road, "but if it comes to war I shall volunteer, same as my father did twenty years ago."

The Cockney sense of humour was already showing itself again with that irony which makes a jest of death itself. Those

trench-diggers in Kensington Gardens and other pleasure-grounds were getting off their little jokes with the onlookers.

"Be sure you don't forget your hot-water bottle, ma'am," said one of them to an elderly and anxious-looking woman. "It will be a comfort on a cold night in the trenches."

"All we want now," said another man, "is a few mouse-traps."

Poor jokes, perhaps, but good enough to raise a laugh.

There was not much laughter. An American observer looked into people's eyes and saw how sombre they were, how very grave and thoughtful. In some of them he saw a look of anguish. They were the eyes of women who had been through one war and knew the price of it. They were the eyes of women he saw coming out of Westminster Abbey, where they had gone to pray for peace. One of them spoke to him. It was a lady he had met at dinner one night with Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Speed.

"Any late news?" she asked, knowing him to be a newspaper man.

"Nothing very good," said John, who knew that the latest news was very bad.

"Oh, well," she said, "we must hope for the best. Perhaps our prayers will be heard."

"The last hope, perhaps," said John. "I wouldn't bet on it."

The news was bad.

Chamberlain had sent one of his officials—Sir Horace Wilson—with a last plea to Hitler to give more time to negotiation before using armed force. That last plea had failed. The answer was an order for general mobilization of the German Army at two o'clock on the following day, September 29th. From Berlin came reports that if the Czechs had not accepted the Godesberg terms by that hour hostilities would begin. The French Air Chief, General Gamelin, had flown to London for consultation with the British Air Minister and military advisers. A partial mobilization in France was

proceeding quietly and the French people were waiting for events in a calm but anxious mood. At the railway stations there were moving scenes when the young reservists parted from their mothers, wives and sisters as if Time had stretched out a spectral hand and pushed the clock back to 1914.

A scene of that kind was happening in London as John saw when he took a taxi to Victoria Station, where he was going to meet Lucy's husband, not coming over for a summer holiday, but—after frantic telegrams—coming to fetch his wife and babe before the outbreak of a war in which he would be wanted.

With the incurable instinct of a newspaper man John glanced out of the window to see the latest news placards. At every street corner and wherever a newsboy stood three words in big letters leapt to his eyes :

BRITISH FLEET MOBILIZES

The taxi-driver pushed back his window when he was held up in a block of traffic and spoke hoarsely over his shoulder :

"That's a knock for Mister Hitler. Well, I'm glad they've called out the Fleet at last ! Time, too ! That's the way to talk to dictators, in their own language. They'll understand all right."

"Sure," said John.

It was big news. So England meant business. Would Hitler take the hint ? If he was bluffing it might call his bluff. If he wasn't bluffing it might cause him to think twice. It was the blockade of Germany in the last war which had brought them to their knees.

On the platform at Victoria Station were squads of naval reservists in uniform standing about among their kitbags. No women were allowed beyond a barrier, but outside it a number of women were saying good-bye to their men, with farewell embraces closely held. Only a few of them, John noticed, were

trench-diggers in Kensington Gardens and other pleasure-grounds were getting off their little jokes with the onlookers.

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crying. The men talked quietly among themselves without excitement or any visible emotion. They were a fine-looking crowd, with handsome clear-cut faces and steady eyes.

John spoke to one of their petty officers.

"This looks like business."

The naval man eyed him for a moment and seemed to think him harmless.

"That's what it is! And it may be a bloody business before we've done with it."

He seemed to detect some difference in John's speech.

"American, ain't you?"

"An American newspaper man."

"Oh, are you, indeed! Well, are you folk coming in with us this time, or are you standing on one side strictly neutral, until a few skyscrapers fall in New York?"

"Ever seen anything of the Germans?" asked John, evading this question.

"Lots of 'em," said the petty officer, "and I like 'em. It'll be a pity if we have to scrap with each other again, and all about a bunch of gypsies in Central Europe. Bohemians, they tell me. Well, I ain't a blinking politician."

John stood by the barrier of the platform for the train from Dover.

Its passengers came surging out. Among them was a tall, straightbacked young man, very pale, with a little black moustache. It was Lucy's husband, Louis. He was staring straight ahead of him until John grabbed his arm. Then he gave a cry in French and flung his arm about John and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Mon ami! Jean! Que penses tu de tout ce sacré charivari? C'est effroyable, n'est-ce pas? C'est idiot, n'est-ce pas? Je suis en désespoir. Ma pauvre femme! Mon pauvre petit bébé!"

"Go easy," said John. "My French doesn't get as far as that."

In the taxi Louis calmed himself and spoke English.

"I am in the reserve of officers. I shall be called up in

twenty-four hours. I have just time to fly back with Lucy and my little son."

"How are things in France?" asked John.

"Things in France," said Louis, "are ridiculous. We are governed, of course, by a pack of imbeciles and bandits. Those who are not bandits are imbeciles. Those who are not imbeciles are bandits."

"Well, now, that makes things clear," said John. "I get you, friend."

"The French people," said Louis, "are heroic. They await their doom with courage and resignation. It will cost the Germans a million men to take the Maginot Line. That is true. Our French people are, as usual, magnificent in the hour of danger. But why should there be this danger? That is what I ask."

"That's what we're all asking," said John.

"Why should France be pledged to fight for Czechoslovakia?" asked Louis. "I will tell you! It is because our bandits who call themselves politicians have allied themselves with Soviet Russia and with the Czechs. At this hour in France there are many assassins—they call themselves Communists—who do not want to make any settlement with Germany, however reasonable, because they want war. But why do they want a war? The answer is simple, my friend. They want a war because they have decided upon a struggle between Fascism and Communism. They want to Bolshevize Europe with the help of that beautiful democrat Stalin. Behind the scenes they are trying to sabotage Daladier's agreement with Chamberlain. It is for that reason that the French people will be called upon for sacrifice. It is for that reason that I, Louis de Maresquel, shall undoubtedly die in some dirty ditch filled with the bodies of French boys."

"That's taking too gloomy a view," said John, patting the knee of this delicate-looking young man who happened to be his brother-in-law.

"No," said Louis. "I look at things with very clear eyes.

I am, of course, afraid to die—death is very unpleasant—but I shall look as brave as possible and lead my men forward until I fall. That is necessary for the honour of my family. But I shall never cease to curse those brigands who have led France into this madness and who know that by their own treachery and political action France will go to war with out-of-date weapons and a weak Air Force.”

He was, as John knew, a member of *L'Action Francaise* on the Extreme Right of French political opinion. It was necessary, no doubt, to take his political views with at least one grain of salt and possibly a whole salt-cellar. But his meeting with Lucy that evening was very affecting, and John slipped out of the room when they wept together because of this shadow of death which hung over them, as that night it hung over millions of human souls in Europe.

LXII

THE last hope seemed to have gone when the British Prime Minister made a short and emotional speech over the wireless. John heard it in his own study with Peter Langdon, who had come in for the latest news. Judy was out somewhere, probably with her man, Robin, and John's mother had retired to her own room while Louis stayed upstairs with Lucy and the small boy.

"I still have hope," said Langdon, before Chamberlain's speech.

But the Prime Minister spoke as a man almost without hope. He spoke of all the letters he had had, most of them from women, the mothers and sisters of his own countrymen. But they had come also from other countries, and many from Germany, and it was heart-breaking, he said, to read the anxiety they revealed.

"If I felt my responsibility heavy before," said Mr. Chamberlain, "such letters have made it seem almost overwhelming. How horrible, fantastic, incredible, it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing! It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle should be the subject of war."

He believed that if more time were allowed even then it would be possible to fulfil the arrangement regarding the Sudetens in a fair and peaceful way. On his visit to Godesberg he had been taken completely by surprise, he said, when he

found that Hitler insisted that the territory should be handed over to him immediately, and immediately occupied by German troops, without previous arrangements for safeguarding the people in the territory who were not German and did not want to join the Reich.

"I must say that I find this attitude unreasonable," said Mr. Chamberlain.

He repeated his pledge to Hitler to guarantee the fulfilment of the Anglo-French plan, and said he would not hesitate to pay even a third visit to Germany if he thought it would do any good.

There was one moving and forceful passage in his speech.

"I am myself," he said, "a man of peace to the depths of my soul. Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me, but if I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force I should feel that it must be resisted."

"It's the speech of a hopeless man," said John.

He rose from a stool on which he had been sitting near the wireless and paced up and down the room nervously.

"I'm an American," he said. "I'm just over here as an American observer. But, by God, Langdon, this horror tears at my heart! You people have to go through hell. All because one man refuses any kind of concession and wants to have his war. It makes me mad. It gives me gooseflesh."

Langdon stood up with his back to the fireplace, and his head slightly raised, staring straight through the wall to some vision beyond.

"Until the last moment," he said, "I can't believe that Hitler wants war when he can get all that he has asked for by peaceful means."

John answered harshly :

"Not all that he has asked, believe me! He has asked for complete surrender and humiliation of the Czechs. That's what he wants. That's what Chamberlain won't give him and what the Czechs refuse."

Langdon gave a little groan and then spoke with a kind of desperate optimism.

"Something will happen to prevent it. Unless the spirit of God has forsaken this world there must be a last-minute reprieve from this pit of horror."

"I don't see the spirit of God moving in this affair," said John. "I see only the spirit of Evil, which I guess is another name for old man Satan."

"Chamberlain has done well, whatever happens," said Langdon. "He has spent himself in the cause of peace."

John was still pacing up and down his room with one lock of hair falling over his forehead.

Suddenly he stopped and spoke with emotion.

"Well, I'll say he's made one American convert. I'm a Chamberlain man. If anybody raises his voice against him I'll take immediate action with a clenched fist. No one can blame him for his failure. He's given a great lead to humanity."

"Has he failed?" asked Langdon. "Are you sure of that?"

"There's not a hope," said John Barton.

LXIII

JOHN BARTON sat with his English and American colleagues in the Press Gallery of the House of Commons. For the first time since the beginning of the crisis the Prime Minister was going to give an account of his proceedings and lift the curtain from the hidden stage where the unknown plot of this astonishing drama had been played at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. The British people had been allowed to know very little. They had had nothing much but rumour and unofficial news and the guesses of "diplomatic correspondents" and the leakage of official news in France upon which to base any judgment or measure the chances between war and peace, upon which their own lives were at stake. No man in England outside the Cabinet and the leaders of the Opposition knew even now the reasons for this immediate threat of war, nor the differences in geographical detail of the Anglo-French plan and the Godesberg ultimatum. No man knew why the leader of Germany went steadily forward to war when by the guarantee of Chamberlain he had been promised the cession of the Sudeten Germans agreed to by the Czechs themselves. The only points of difference seemed to be the time limit and the immediate entry of the German troops and the drastic methods of taking over the Sudeten territory.

The Galleries were crowded. The Ambassadors of many nations were there. The Archbishop of Canterbury and many of the Peers had come into the Lower House before the lights began to glimmer in the Chamber.

It was Black Wednesday, September 28th, 1938, a date to

be remembered in history. For one American observer it had been an unpleasant morning. While the fate of the world was in the balance he had been worried by private affairs and private tragedy. Lucy had gone away weeping, with her husband and small boy. She had been very brave until the last moment, and then had broken down while John had put his arms about her. She was going back to France on the edge of war. Before a week was out she might be widowed. Before a week was out little Louis-Philippe might be one of the victims of an air raid over Paris. She might never see John or Judy again. They were all in the danger zone.

On the way to the House of Commons John had passed gangs of men digging trenches feverishly in London squares and gardens. Outside the Houses of Parliament crowds had gathered, and stood very still and silent. It wouldn't be a popular war if it happened. England would go into it glumly. This time there would be no gay lads singing, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary". It would begin on the home front in mean streets and factory districts, and down by the docks and over Government offices, and at the big railway stations where already crowds were beginning to get out of London. All arrangements for the billeting of the children had been made. Some of them were already leaving, with tickets fastened to their frocks and jackets, and fright in their eyes.

One of John's American colleagues in the Press Gallery whispered to him.

"Are you staying in this doomed isle?"

"Sure," said John.

"I shall make a getaway," said the other man. "I don't see why I should lay down my young life in a quarrel which is none of mine. Besides, I'm thinking of my wife. She's going to have a baby. I'd like it to be born in sweet American air, far from the firing line."

"Sound idea," said John.

"Europe is a cauldron of Hell's broth, anyway," said his colleague. "I'll be glad to see the peace and beauty of Chicago."

"You will," said John.

He gazed round the Chamber of the House of Commons. There was tense expectancy for the entry of the Prime Minister. Queen Mary and the Duchess of Kent were in the Speaker's Gallery over the clock. Suddenly, as a tall, thin, long-necked man came into the House there was an outburst of cheers. All the members on the ministerial benches rose in their places and the noise of their cheers continued for several minutes. They were for the Prime Minister, who, for a moment, showed no sign of being aware of the ovation from his supporters and then turned and smiled at them. On the Opposition benches only a few men joined in the applause. There were questions and a little formal business before the Prime Minister rose, fingering some notes. In a matter-of-fact way, without rhetoric or self-conscious eloquence, though now and then with a restrained emotion, he told the story of events which had led up to this crisis and this threat of war. He went back to the Peace Treaties which had constituted Czechoslovakia as a separate State containing many minorities, and regretted that the League of Nations had not used its powers to make some revision of grievances among those minorities before passions had become inflamed to explosion point.

The Government had been faced by three alternatives. One of them was to go to war with Germany if Czechoslovakia were attacked. The second was to stand aside. The third was to try for a peaceful settlement by way of mediation. They had rejected the first course. They had no treaty liabilities with Czechoslovakia. He had always refused to accept any such liabilities and he doubted whether the British people, who do not lightly resort to war, would have followed if the Government had tried to lead them into war to prevent a minority from obtaining autonomy, or even choosing to pass under some other government.

They had rejected the second alternative of standing aside. They had accepted the third alternative of mediation.

He described the task and failure of Lord Runciman to

build a bridge between the conflicting views of Sudeten Germans and Czechs. Reluctantly the Czechs had conceded point by point, but always the Sudetens increased their demands, under influence, no doubt, from Berlin. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, had tried to induce the German Government to abstain from intervention, but without result. Then, in July they had become aware of important and unusual military activity in Germany—the calling-up of reserves, the conscription of labour, the digging of formidable works on the Western front.

Step by step he gave a narrative of the increasing tension and anxieties and continued efforts to find a peaceful solution until, finally, violent incidents between Czechs and Sudeten Germans showed that the peace could hardly be held much longer. It was then that he decided to visit Hitler himself.

At this dramatic moment of his narrative there was intense silence in the House of Commons. No paper rustled. No man shifted in his seat. No cough came from the crowded benches. In this assembly and the crowded galleries every man and woman listened with a hushed intensity.

"I have no doubt," said Mr. Chamberlain in his clear dry voice, "that my visit alone prevented an invasion for which everything was ready."

Describing the interview with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, he said that he was quickly aware that the situation was more acute than he had expected.

"Herr Hitler declared to me," he said, "that the Sudeten Germans must have self-determination and that sooner than wait he would risk a world war."

At that moment of the Prime Minister's speech there was a slight movement among the crowded Members. It was as though those last words had made them gasp.

Sooner than wait he would risk a world war!

Those were terrible words for any man to speak lightly, or to speak at all, if he had any love of humanity, or any vision of what a world war would mean in human agony.

He had asked Hitler then why he had asked him to travel so far only to waste his time, and as an answer he was asked to give an assurance that the British Government would favour self-determination of the Sudeten Germans. On that point it was necessary to consult his colleagues and the French Government. On that point he had returned to England, and before leaving he had obtained from Hitler a pledge that the German Army would not march during the negotiations.

"That pledge still stands," he said.

Then he had consulted the Ministers of France. They had drawn up the Anglo-French plan recommending the Czechs to cede the Sudeten districts, according to recommendations from Lord Runciman that that was now the only possible solution. The Czech Government under great pressure had agreed to make the sacrifice.

Then back he had gone to Godesberg.

Here he was confronted with new demands which came to him as a profound shock. He had retired after his first interview with a sense of foreboding. Hitler regarded the Anglo-French plan as "too dilatory". He put forward his terms. They were like an ultimatum to a defeated enemy and contained a time limit for their fulfilment which did not go beyond October 1.

Chamberlain had retired to his hotel. All day long, that day and next, there were exchanges of notes between him and the German Chancellor which did not modify, but indeed increased, the gravity of the negotiations.

He had a late interview with the German Chancellor which was emotional and dramatic. It began at half past ten at night and lasted until the small hours of the morning.

"On this occasion," said the Prime Minister, "I spoke very frankly. I dwelt with all the emphasis at my command on the risks which would be increased by insistence upon such terms, and the terrible consequences of a war, if war ensued. I declared that the language and manner of the document, which I described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum,

would profoundly shock public opinion, and I bitterly reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond to the efforts which I had made to secure peace."

These strong words seemed to have some effect on Hitler. He answered in friendly tones, thanking Mr. Chamberlain for his efforts, which he said he reciprocated, saying that he had held back military action which he had planned.

In his last words he assured the British Prime Minister that this was the last territorial claim he would make in Europe, and that he had no wish to include other races in the German Reich. He spoke earnestly of his wish to be friends with England and said that in the matter of the colonies there would be no mobilization.

At this stage of Chamberlain's speech there was some derision from the Opposition benches, who doubted Hitler's sincerity, and the Prime Minister turned for a moment to rebuke them. His speech went on describing his last efforts to keep the peace. He had sent Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin with a personal note to Hitler. Hitler's answer to that was that he must stand by the memorandum.

The last effort had failed. The world stood on the very brink of war. It was, it seemed, the end of all negotiations.

Every man and woman in the House was aware of the fatal significance of the Prime Minister's words when he described the failure of that last effort. So then it was to be war, perhaps in a few hours. Already in London sandbags were being piled against the walls of palaces and public buildings. When would the first bomb come crashing through this very roof?

An American observer in the Press Gallery stared up at the high roof and wondered how long it would keep out the wind and rain.

The young man from Chicago whispered to him:
"Something is happening down there."

A paper was being passed along the Front Bench. Lord Dunglass, the Prime Minister's private secretary, had handed

it to Sir John Simon, who was trying to attract his chief's attention to it; but he was absorbed in what he was saying and ignored the paper. He was saying something about an appeal to Italy for a last-hour conference. Sir John Simon tried again and pushed it in front of him. After further disregard of it the Prime Minister took up the paper and read it through his pince-nez. For what seemed like a long time he studied it. Was it a message of ill omen?

Suddenly he spoke.

"I have something more to tell the House."

He paused again and there was an intense silence of expectancy.

"I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. . . . I need not say what my answer will be."

This announcement, coming at the end of a speech so ominous, so devoid of any new hope, so detailed in its narrative of desperate effort ending, it seemed, in failure, was perhaps one of the most dramatic moments in the history of the House of Commons. An extraordinary demonstration took place. Not only did all the Members of the House rise and cheer for many minutes, but contrary to all rules and precedents there was loud clapping from all the galleries. The Archbishop of Canterbury beat his hands on the rail in front of him. The Duke of Kent waved his Order Paper. Even the Press men were on their feet talking excitedly.

To Munich also would go Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier, the French Premier.

Mr. Chamberlain spoke a few more words with considerable emotion. "There can be no honourable Member of this House," he said, "who does not feel his heart leap because the crisis has been once more postponed to give us once more an opportunity to try what reason and goodwill and discussion will do to settle a problem which is already in sight of settlement. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say any more. . . ."

He sat down abruptly. For weeks this elderly man had

been fighting for peace, day by day and almost night by night, with hardly any sleep and with terrible responsibilities upon his mind and heart. He had flown across Europe. He had sat with his Cabinet in almost constant session. He had not spared his body or soul in this adventure to save the world from inconceivable horror. Now, for a moment, he was overcome by this new hope at the eleventh hour. His friends and his political opponents came to grasp his hand. One of them was Mr. Winston Churchill, who afterwards became a critic of the peace he had made, like many others who now acclaimed him and thanked God for this respite from the grisly spectre.

"And thus," said the Parliamentary reporter of *The Times*, "ended with a ray of light too bright to be moonshine a scene which had opened in the deepest gloom."

"What do you know about that?" asked the young man of Chicago to his American colleague.

"I'll have to take to religion in my old age," said John Barton.

He was deeply moved.

For millions of men and women and for millions of children this was a respite from death.

As John walked through Palace Yard he took off his hat and let the wind play about his forehead. He took off his hat to Mr. Chamberlain. It was an act of homage from his heart and soul.

LXIV

ONCE again a big group of journalists, among whom was John Barton with other Americans, were at Heston Aerodrome at an early hour. Crowds had assembled at the gates and a roar of cheers arose as the Prime Minister's car drove through. In the field were many members of the British Government who had made an heroic effort to leave their beds after but little sleep, to prove their loyalty to a man—their chief—who seemed indifferent to fatigue and had astonishing reserves of strength, although in normal times his health was not robust. At the aerodrome also were members of the German Embassy with Dr. Kordt, the *Chargé d'Affaires* in London, who were among the first to greet the Prime Minister with enthusiastic good wishes. Everybody was trying to shake hands with him, and John Barton was one of them, rewarded by a friendly smile from this elderly man who looked happy this morning because of this new chance of peace after a day when all hope seemed lost.

He spoke a few simple words and recalled a line of Shakespeare which lurked in his memory.

"When I come back I hope I may say, as Hotspur said, in Henry IV: 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'"

From that field in Heston cheers were blown by a light breeze as the aeroplane rose from the ground and flew on strong wings until it looked like a faint smudge against the sky. With it flew the hopes and prayers of a great multitude

of people throughout the world still standing on the edge of an infernal pit.

That night the world waited for news from Munich. As hour after hour passed the tension became very strained and almost intolerable. Perhaps, after all, there would be the final break and the Almighty Smash. The discussions between those statesmen of the Four Powers had been going on from noon until ten minutes past eight o'clock. It was those hours from ten o'clock onwards which seemed interminable and intolerable. Would they never stop talking? What was going on in that palace at Munich? Would the end of it be the end of all things, including all beauty and all the loveliness of life? Would Hitler, strange and sinister man, reject all compromise and demand his war?

In an old house in St. Leonard's Terrace a group of people waited for the great decision, as in countless millions of other houses in other cities of the world people sat up that night waiting and listening to sound vibrations from that new instrument which is now the announcer of all the news and drama of life. It was in the house which John had hired for himself and family.

Judy was there with her mother and with the man she loved. John was waiting for news at his office, and had promised to ring through as soon as he heard the result of the Munich meeting. At half past nine Peter Langdon came in with his wife, looking strained and overwrought. The faithful Mrs. Pockett made an appearance with the coffee and before leaving the room summed up the world situation by the light that was in her.

"That man Hitler," she said, "doesn't wear no school tie, as the saying is. You know what I mean, dearies. You can't get a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But I pins my faith on Mr. Chamberlain. He won't let you down, dearies. So why worry?"

There was a moment's silence while she shut the door, and then a moment's laughter.

"That old lady," said Robert Bramley, "is related spiritually and morally to the late Queen Victoria of blessed memory. As long as we have these brave old ladies all is well with us. Britannia will continue to rule the waves, so why worry, as she aptly reminded us?"

Judy was worrying, but she laughed at Robin's words. She was worrying because no good news came over the wireless. Robin would be leaving her before long. He belonged to the reserve of officers in the Grenadier Guards and would certainly be wanted.

It was good, she thought, to have him with her on this evening. He had made a very favourable impression on her mother, who liked his courteous manner to her, and his good humour in listening to her little stories of psychical research, in which he seemed interested. In fact, he had told her some remarkable ghost stories connected with old English houses which were very thrilling to her. She was delighted with Judy's future husband.

Langdon also had taken to him and agreed with his point of view on world affairs.

Conversation was not very continuous. This group of people, like all others that night, kept their ears open for the sounds that came from the magic box recording vibrations from all the capitals of Europe. Every now and then the announcer of the B.B.C. interrupted the musical programme to say that no further news had come from Munich, where the discussions were still going on.

"Do you think there's any hitch?" asked Langdon anxiously.

"I expect Mussolini is doing a lot of talking," said Robin. "When Italians begin talking time has no meaning for them. They love the music of their own words."

Katherine Langdon smiled at Robin Bramley.

"It's always worth hearing," she said. "Italian always sounds like poetry even when a waiter is calling down a tube for poached eggs on toast."

"I agree," said Robin. "Like this, do you mean?"

He gave a very good imitation of an Italian waiter giving an order to the kitchen.

"Listen!" said Langdon suddenly. Another announcement. But the gentleman of the B.B.C. again repeated that there was no further news.

Every quarter of an hour it was repeated. For an hour, two hours, three hours.

Judy saw the effect of the strain on her friends.

Peter Langdon sighed deeply now and then. His hands were restless. Constantly he fastened and unfastened one of the buttons of his dinner-jacket. Several times he stood up and walked across the room to look through the window-blinds, and then came and sat down again with that faint sigh of his.

"I expect Paul is listening in his rooms at Oxford," he said presently.

He was always thinking of his handsome young son. It was for him and the world's youth that he was suffering this agony of uncertainty.

At midnight his patience seemed exhausted.

"I think perhaps we had better go back," he told his wife. "I find this very trying. . . ."

"Don't worry, darling," said his wife. "It's going to be all right."

"Personally," said Mrs. Barton in her crisp American voice "I have had the best authority for saying that there has never been any real danger of war."

"Thanks a thousand times," said Langdon, "for letting us come round to-night. I don't think Katherine and I could have gone through this evening alone."

He looked ill, and Judy saw that his wife glanced at him anxiously.

"We shall hear the good news to-morrow morning," she said.

"I wish I had your faith, my dear," said Peter Langdon, taking her hand and raising it to his lips.

After they had left, Mrs. Barton went up to bed, leaving Judy and Robin in the drawing-room.

"Our friend Langdon," said Robin, "is suffering incredible tortures of suspense. It's because he's such a sensitive plant. All the world's cruelties bear down on him."

"Robin," said Judy, "how do you feel about it yourself? Tell me truly."

"I should say the odds are on peace," he said seriously. "I can't believe that Hitler will set the world aflame and send his troops to spill Czech blood when no blood need flow. I can't believe that any man alive can be so devilish as that."

"It's nice having you here in my own home," said Judy.

"It will be nicer when I have you in mine," he told her. "I like the shape of your head. I like the shape of your funny little nose. I like the twist of your lips. I like everything about you, plain Judy."

He put his arms around her and held her close.

She was in his arms with her head on his shoulder when the telephone bell rang.

Judy released herself from Robin's embrace and ran to the instrument on a little table by the fireplace. It was John speaking. He gave the news from Munich.

"Thank God!" cried Judy. "Oh, John, I'm terribly glad."

She put back the receiver and went towards Robin. Her eyes were shining and a little wet.

"Robin! All's well! Hitler and the others have signed an agreement. It's peace!"

"Good news," said Robin quietly. "You and I can get on with our jobs. Youth lives. *Grâce à Dieu!*"

"If we have a child," said Judy, "we'll call it Neville Chamberlain Bramley."

Robin raised his humorous eyebrows.

"A child!" he said with some astonishment. "Well, that's an idea! Why not? It would be rather a joke."

They laughed because youth had been reprieved.

LXV

THE relief in England at the lifting of the dark shadow was curiously quiet. John Barton made a note of that among his observations. It was as though they had come out of a nightmare and were not quite awake. They used expressions amazingly inadequate to the situation.

"Well, that's a good thing," said the road-sweeper outside his house with whom he had a few words.

"Them trenches look a bit silly now," said one of the old Chelsea Pensioners standing in his red coat and looking through the railings of Burton Court. "They wouldn't have been much good, anyhow," he remarked.

The only demonstrations of joy, or at least of gratitude, took place when the Prime Minister arrived back. At Heston again, many thousands of people had come out by car to acclaim him, and the cheering was led by the young voices of English schoolboys. They were Eton boys in their top hats and short jackets, who had asked permission to pay this homage.

In London there were other big crowds who had been standing for hours in heavy rain which fell that afternoon. They were densely packed outside the gates of Buckingham Palace to which the Prime Minister drove just as the weather cleared, and a rainbow which seemed symbolical appeared over the roofs of London. In answer to the shouts of the crowds the man to whom their gratitude went out appeared on the Palace balcony bareheaded and smiling. The King

pushed him forward and he waved his hand to the people to whom he had brought the gift of peace, as they hoped, and as he believed, that afternoon.

In Number Ten Downing Street there was the scent of flowers. Masses of roses and chrysanthemums had been sent to await his arrival because of those words he had spoken: "*Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.*"

There were also thousands of telegrams arriving from all parts of the earth expressing the world's gratitude for this peace which had prevented the flow of blood, and the ruin of most things, as he and they believed that afternoon.

At Heston he had said that the settlement of the Czechoslovak problem was part, he hoped, to a larger settlement in which all Europe might find peace. He had brought back with him a scrap of paper signed by Hitler and himself. It held the hope that their two nations should never go to war again with each other. It held the pledge that any other questions arising between them should be dealt with by the method of consultation.

For a few hours Neville Chamberlain, knight-errant of peace, with his wife's hand clasped in his, had the right to think that he had earned the gratitude of his own and other people. In his ears still rang the cheers of great multitudes. In Munich he had been acclaimed by the German people. They had shouted to him "*Heil Chamberlain!*" German women had pressed close to his car. German soldiers and police had cheered him. German boys had raised their hands to him in smiling salute.

The terms he had obtained from Hitler were now accepted by the Czechs.

"I have taken the decision," said General Sirovy, the Czech Prime Minister, "to save life and to save the nation. As a soldier I have had to choose the way of peace."

Those terms had surely saved the Czech people from annihilation. They had substituted the peaceful entry of the German troops in orderly stages instead of Hitler's threat of

invasion by force with all the frightfulness of modern weapons. It had been a victory, after all, for the method of negotiation against the method of violence and bloodshed. Was it not, then, a victory in which all men might rejoice?

So it seemed in most minds for a little while, though in the very hour of his home-coming the British Prime Minister was faced by the resignation of one of his colleagues who had no pleasure in this way of peace.

The common peoples of the world remained loyal in their gratitude to the man who had dragged them back from the flaming pit. But others—intellectuals, political journalists, party men, and fanatics of the Left, raised cries against him even before he had slept that night.

They were cries of "A Great Surrender" and "A Great Betrayal". Those Labour members of the British House of Commons who had cheered him at that dramatic moment when the invitation came from Herr Hitler now forgot those cheers. Some of those who had been most frightened when war looked imminent now became bold and bloody in their denunciation of this peace, when it was peace.

Many highbrowed young men went about downcast and dejected. One of them addressed John Barton over a luncheon-table and said, "I am ashamed of being an Englishman." One of them went as far as saying that he would deny his nationality and become a Czech.

There were generous minds among them. They were tortured by the thought that Chamberlain had not brought back peace with honour, but peace with dishonour. When they read the terms of peace and knew what losses and humiliations would be inflicted on the Czechs they felt ashamed and conscience-stricken, forgetting the folly of the Peace Treaties which had put so many minorities under Czech rule against their will. They looked at photographs of Czech refugees entitled "The Price of Peace", forgetting that if peace had not been made there would have been other photographs of piled corpses entitled "The Price of War". They had seen

this crisis as a struggle between Democracy and Dictatorship, and believed, with a sense of shame, that Democracy and its ideals had surrendered to the thumping fist of Hitler. They forgot that Neville Chamberlain had broken the threat of the mailed fist by the substitute of reason. They forgot that the Sudeten Germans had a right to self-determination, anyhow, and had chosen to join the Reich.

John Barton, American observer, was not one of those who denounced Chamberlain after giving homage to him. Now and again he wondered whether this was a peace, or only a respite. Now and again he had dark doubts about the chance of appeasement in Europe.

But with regard to the Czechs he remembered a question put to him one day by his friend Peter Langdon, who also had had these doubts and dark despairs following the crisis.

"Supposing," said Langdon, "that England and France had fought that war and, after incredible agonies and losses, had won it. Should we have put the Sudetens and Hungarians and Poles under Czech rule again?"

"No," said John, "I suppose not."

"That blows all this criticism of surrender and betrayal sky-high," said Langdon. "It makes nonsense of it."

John accepted that argument but raised another.

"Where is this peace, while every nation on earth is increasing its weapons of destruction and defence? Isn't it only an armed truce for a few months, or at best for a year or two?"

"We must still go on working for the Munich agreement," said Langdon. "It's the only policy, and the German people will help us. Everything I hear from Germany proves that the people are for peace."

That was true. But the leaders of Germany were not anxious, it seemed, to follow up the Munich agreement in the spirit of that slip of paper handed to Chamberlain. No words of sweetness came from the lips of Adolf Hitler. He was

irritated by criticism of his methods in the English newspapers. He spoke harsh and contemptuous words about certain politicians. He named some of them—Churchill, Duff-Cooper, Eden.

"How do I know," he asked, "that such warmongers will not be in power some day, according to the parliamentary system of democracy?"

Within six weeks of the Munich agreement events happened in Germany which for a time put back all hopes of a friendly understanding between Germany and England, and between Germany and the civilized world. In revenge for the murder of a German diplomat shot by a young Pole made mad by the sufferings of his parents, there was an outbreak of destruction against Jewish synagogues and shops and business premises throughout Germany. It was a reign of terror surpassing any previous episode in the German persecution of the Jewish race, and conducted by young ruffians working in gangs. Thousands of Jews were arrested and torn from their families. Jewish women and children were terrorized. There were many suicides again. It was a black chapter in the history of a country with an old tradition of culture. It shocked the German people themselves—the decent-minded folk, the old good-natured Germans, even some of those who had no love for Jews.

Worse followed, for worse than the brutal hooliganism of youthful mobs were the deliberate, carefully planned, and cold-blooded decrees passed against German Jewry. They forced the Jews to pay for the destruction which had been done against them. They forfeited Jewish property and money. They denied all human rights and liberties to these people and forbade them any means of livelihood in any business or trade. They were condemned by the conscience of the world, and by all liberal-minded men and women, though German propagandists pretended to believe that this condemnation was due only to Jewish influence and blackmail.

In England, Germany had many friends like Peter

Langdon. They had believed that only by friendly understanding with Germany could peace be assured in Europe. They had worked in that spirit and in that hope. Now they were abashed. For how could there be friendly understanding with a country subject to ideas which, if one understands them, are more terrible and sinister than if one does not understand them?

That was the question which one day was put to John Barton by his friend Langdon, who had been zealous for good relations with Germany and a passionate pilgrim of peace.

He answered it himself by a kind of desperate hope.

"I can't think the German folk will stand for this kind of thing. Hitler himself must see that it will undo all his achievements and lead to his downfall. We must still hold out the hand of friendship to the German people. We have had our own black episodes in history. We too have been cruel and ruthless at times. We are not very old in virtue, God knows! One day Germany will emerge from this period of darkness—unworthy of her old traditions—and light the lamps again."

"Your second name is 'Hope', Langdon," said John, unconvinced by any of his words.

He met another friend who had loved Germany until this Jewish horror, and who loved the German people still, she said, in spite of it. It was a young woman named Anne Ede.

He met her in Kensington Gardens, where once they had sat on a summer day. She came towards him across the grass with a small dog scampering beside her.

"Hullo, John!" she cried, as though she had seen him only yesterday.

"Hullo, Anne!" he answered. "I thought you were staying in Berlin."

"I came back," she told him. "I saw things in the

Kurfürstendamm the other day. I was not amused, as dear Queen Victoria remarked on a painful occasion. Shall we go and have tea somewhere?"

They went and had tea somewhere. It was nice, he thought, to see her again.

THE END

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General Fiction

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MANY problems come to mothers. Many decisions they must take, but what can any woman do if to her comes the staggering discovery that her dearly loved son of a respectable marriage has fallen in love with her own daughter—child of those early days of the Great War, when emotion swept aside convention? This is the amazing problem of Joan Kennedy's new novel and around it is told an absorbing tale, vivid and full of dramatic human interest. 7s. 6d.

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General Fiction

Important Announcement

Peter Mendelssohn

NEW NOVEL

Author of "*All That Matters*"

ON the night of Easter Sunday, 1938, the inhabitants of a small Czechoslovak town on the Danube near the Hungarian frontier discovered a party of Jews, expelled from Austria, who were huddled together on the breakwater. After receiving food and shelter the party was moved across to the Hungarian border, but they were turned back by frontier guards. Eventually they were rescued by a French tug-boat after further misadventures. This incident, recently reported in the Press, forms the theme of Mr. Mendelssohn's new novel. It is a powerful novel of fifty-one unhappy souls robbed of their Fatherland; behind them rises the spectre of tens of thousands of their comrades in the Central Europe of today with whom they share their desperate fate. 8s. 6d.

Hilde Spiel

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General Fiction

R. H. Mottram YOU CAN'T HAVE IT BACK

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JOCELYN RIDFAST is one of those who won't give up. He is engaged, it is true, in an occupation in which there is no strict retiring age. Yet he is conscious enough that he has had his chance. He does not complain, for he has been sufficiently successful to have avoided poverty and disappointment. Perhaps for this very reason he feels that he should have a prolonged innings, or even a new one. And just at this point he falls in love with a young girl half his age, or less. The feelings that awake in him rejuvenate him. He begins to live more vigorously. This enthralling novel shows that no one can start afresh, they can only start again or continue.

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General Fiction

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7s. 6d.

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